BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY on TERROR TRAIL

ROY ROCKWOOD

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Claude
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Mother

BOMBA SAW HIDEOUS PAINTED FACES ABOVE HIM.
"Bomba, the Jungle Boy, on Terror Trail" Page 127

BOMBA

THE JUNGLE BOY ON TERROR TRAIL

OR

The Mysterious Men from the Sky

BY

ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY," "THROUGH SPACE TO MARS," "ON A TORN-AWAY WORLD," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

BOOKS FOR BOYS
By ROY ROCKWOOD

THE BOMBA BOOKS

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY AT THE MOVING MOUNTAIN

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY AT THE GIANT CATARACT

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY ON JAGUAR ISLAND

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY IN THE ABANDONED CITY

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY ON TERROR TRAIL

CUPPLES & LEON CO., Publishers, New York

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY ON TERROR TRAIL
Printed in U. S. A.

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY ON TERROR TRAIL

CHAPTER I

THE MONSTER OF THE SKY

BOMBA, the jungle boy, threading his way through the dense undergrowth, paused suddenly to listen.

What was that strange noise in the air?

He could identify the noises of the jungle, the hiss of the snake, the whir of the parrot, the grunt of the tapir, the snarl of the jaguar, the scream of the monkey, the bellow of the alligator.

But this odd sound he heard was none of those.

Nor was it the rumble of the earthquake, the labored muttering of the volcano as it strove to burst its bonds, the ominous sighing that precedes the hurricane.

What then was it? He must learn, for in the jungle a disregard of the slightest sound might mean death.

He looked up at the sky through an opening between two huge trees that towered to a height of two hundred feet. It was of cerulean blue, with not the slightest shred of cloud to dim its crystal clearness.

Then it was not thunder that Bomba heard. A humming, a buzzing, deepened into a steady roar. Then, suddenly, a monstrous shape swooped over the open space between the trees and was gone.

There was a sharp intake of breath on the part of Bomba. He gripped more tightly his bow while his left hand sought the knife thrust in his belt.

The boy made a striking picture as he stood there with his lips parted and his face upturned to the sky.

He was apparently about fifteen years of age, tall and strongly developed. His face was bronzed with sun and storm, but the features showed that he was of white blood. Apart from the native tunic and sandals and a puma skin worn across his breast, his body was bare, and the rippling muscles of his powerful arms and legs proclaimed him every inch an athlete. His hair was brown and his eyes brown and piercing and alight with natural intelligence. The puma skin emphasized his likeness to one of the young gods of the ancient mythologies.

Although just now there were surprise and wonder in those unflinching eyes, there was no sign of panic. He had faced death too often in the myriad forms it assumed in the Amazon jungle to fear it greatly. His quick wit and dauntless courage had served him too often to desert him now.

Some monstrous thing outside anything in his experience was moaning and roaring above him. Perhaps it had detected him and was preparing to attack and devour him.

He had little doubt that it would. All that was huge and powerful in the jungle was cruel. The puma, the alligator, the anaconda, all lived by taking life and drinking blood. It was the jungle law.

But if Bomba refused to quail while he waited for what might come, the same was far from true of his companion, a native Indian whose life the jungle boy had saved from the flood, who had been his comrade in some terrible experiences and who now followed Bomba with almost dog-like devotion.

As the strange shape swept across the sky, the Indian, Gibo, had given utterance to a shriek of terror and thrown himself on the ground where he groveled abjectly, beating the soil with his head and calling upon his gods for help.

"We are dead, master," he moaned. "The

great snake of the sky seeks to devour us. We go to the place of death."

"Those are foolish words that Gibo speaks," replied Bomba, sparing a brief glance at his follower from his upward gazing. "There is no snake that glides across the sky. Has the boa constrictor wings? Does not the jararaca creep? Does not the cooanaradi hide in the bushes? Gibo's blood has turned to water. He talks like a little child."

But the native shook his head.

"This is the snake of the gods, the evil gods!" he shrieked. "It coils about their throne and goes forth to do their bidding. The old men of the tribe have spoken of it many times. It would have been better if we had perished in the earthquake."

"Is Gibo an infant to believe those things?" asked Bomba rebukingly.

"The elders of the tribe are full of wisdom," replied Gibo. "They have lived long and seen many things and they do not speak foolish things. They say that when it breathes it buzzes like the twang of the bow string and that when it is angry and athirst for blood it roars like the thunder of the cataract. We have heard the buzzing and we have heard the roaring. It is Igmazil, the snake of the gods."

"Pick up your spear, O trembling one," com-

manded Bomba, pointing to the weapon that had dropped from Gibo's nerveless hands. "Whatever it is, if it comes down upon us we will fight. It shall feel the point of Bomba's knife, the sting of Bomba's arrow."

"Bomba is brave," said Gibo humbly. "His heart is like the hardness of the arrowhead. Gibo has seen Bomba fight and Gibo has wondered. But what can his knife and arrows do to Igmazil, whose skin cannot be pierced?"

"Knife and arrow have never failed Bomba yet," replied the lad. "If it be they fail him now, Bomba will know how to die. Give me the spear and go thou and weave mats with the old women of thy tribe."

"No," said Gibo, abashed before his master's scorn and getting to his feet, "Gibo will fight with Bomba if the snake should come. And he will die with Bomba, for none has ever looked upon Igmazil and lived."

The Indian drew close to Bomba, gathering courage from the proximity, and together they bent their gaze upon the sky.

But now the roar had died away. No sound came to their ears except the familiar noises of the jungle that never ceased.

For some minutes they stood thus, and then their tense attitude relaxed.

"Perchance Igmazil was seeking some one

else," ventured Gibo, taking heart of hope, "some one who had offended the demon gods and failed to offer sacrifice."

"It may be," assented Bomba carelessly, willing to humor the superstition of his companion, since it was utterly useless to try to uproot it. "Why should he seek us out? What have we done? We have fought and killed, but only wicked ones who sought our lives. And now let us make haste, for we are still far from the camp of Hondura and we have been three days on the journey."

They pressed on through the jungle, Bomba in advance, his keen eyes on the alert for any sign of danger, while Gibo followed close upon the boy's heels, carrying the bag of treasure they had wrested from Japazy, the fiendish half-breed, Japazy, whose scream of terror as he fell over the cliff to his death still rang in Bomba's ears.

Incalculable wealth was in that pack, diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topazes, jewels that would have purchased a king's ransom.

But priceless as they were, they were as nothing to Bomba compared to the little oblong volume that he carried in his pouch, that little book with the strange characters written in a tongue that he did not understand, and yet which he hoped would reveal to him the story of his birth, of his

parents, the things that he would almost give his life to know.

Suddenly Bomba stopped in his tracks and in a flash fitted an arrow to his string.

Before him, on the banks of a small stream, a tapir was standing. The wind was in the direction of Bomba and carried no scent to the beast.

The bow twanged and the arrow went straight to the animal's heart.

It gave a convulsive spring and then fell over on its side, stricken so swiftly, so unerringly, that it never knew the manner of its death.

"It is good," cried Gibo exultingly, as he and Bomba ran toward the tapir. "Now we shall have meat instead of turtles' eggs."

"Yes," replied Bomba, as he drew the arrow from the body, dried it, and replaced it in his quiver, "Gibo will build a fire while Bomba skins the tapir."

Gibo hastened to gather brush and wood, while Bomba, with a deftness born of long practice, skinned the animal and selected some of the more savory and tender steaks for their meal.

In a short time the fire was burning briskly, and they roasted the meat on an extemporized spit and feasted royally.

It was the first meat they had eaten for three days, for the earthquake that had shaken the district when they had escaped from the camp

of Japazy and the tortures he was preparing for them had driven much of the wild game from the disturbed region.

They had traveled far and fast that day and were very tired, so that after the meal they sat on the grass to rest and gain strength for the long stretch that still lay before them.

Bomba drew from his pouch the little book that he cherished so fondly and gazed without understanding at the queer script that it contained.

It had for him a wonderful fascination, for it had been Japazy's book, and Japazy knew the origin of Bomba, knew who his parents were.

The wicked tongue of the half-breed was forever stilled. But might it not be speaking silently to him from these pages?

From his companion, the frail, white-haired old Casson, Bomba had learned the English letters and could even read some simple printed words in that language. But of handwriting he was wholly ignorant.

Yet he had seen Casson write down things with a pen, and the old man had told him that he was putting down things so that he could remember. Might not Japazy have done the same thing in this little volume?

It was maddening to feel that perhaps he stood on the very threshold of revelation and yet

was forbidden to enter. But some one would know how to read these strange characters; perhaps Casson, who knew so much—or had known so much until he had become half-demented.

"What is it that the master has?" ventured Gibo, when the silence had endured for some time. "The wriggling things that seem like the tracks of a bird when it walks in the wet clay—are they signs to ward off the evil spirit?"

"No," replied Bomba, "those wriggling things can talk. Perhaps they will tell Bomba—"

He stopped abruptly.

Again came that distant buzz, swelling quickly into a roar.

"It is the great snake Igmazil!" shrieked Gibo, throwing himself down on his face in mortal terror.

CHAPTER II

MYSTERY

BOMBA leaped to his feet and fixed his eyes upon the sky. Something in the boy's white blood forbade his yielding to the fear of the supernatural that struck his companion with panic. Yet there was something in that ominous roar that made his heart beat furiously.

Danger was his daily lot. There was no species of beast or reptile in the Amazonian forest that he had not fought and conquered; but they were things that trod or crawled upon the earth, the solid earth, on which he himself found footing and where he felt at home. Up to now he had fought with no creature of the skies, except at times with vultures.

But this thing that was approaching, he knew from the passing glimpse he had caught of it, was bigger than ten vultures and doubtless ten times as ferocious. What would his knife and arrow points avail against such a monster?

Yet he disdained to flee and seek shelter in the forest depths. He stood there proudly, waiting for the enemy to appear.

Then the roar became thunderous and the gigantic bird swept into sight. It was higher now than it had been before, but Bomba's eyes were as keen as a hawk's and he saw it in every detail, the great broad wings, the whirling blades of the propeller, the curious wheels that hung below and seemed to be the creature's feet.

Bomba watched it with a terrible fascination, rooted to the spot.

It disappeared, and he breathed more freely. But an instant later it came in sight again, and this time, instead of shooting like a meteor athwart his vision, it began circling about in great spirals.

Had it seen him? Bomba wondered, with a quickening of the pulse. Was it watching him and preparing to attack? He gripped his bow more tightly and drew an arrow from his quiver.

The nose of the great bird turned down and the creature shot toward him like an arrow from the bow.

"It is coming, master, it is coming!" screamed Gibo, as he rose and turned to flee.

Down came the monster with lightning speed, and Bomba nerved himself for the hopeless combat.

Then, when it had almost reached the tops of the tallest trees, it checked its downward flight,

lifted its nose until it was in a horizontal position, and swept out of sight.

Bomba could scarcely believe his good fortune. He had thought himself doomed. Why had the fell creature checked its course when conquest seemed so easy?

But the boy was in no mood to seek for reasons. It was enough that the monster had left him and Gibo, given them another lease of life.

Gibo's dark skin had turned a yellowish green with fright. He babbled incoherently, invoking all his gods. He was still trembling when he returned to where Bomba was standing.

"Has it gone, master?" he asked, casting anxious glances toward the sky.

"It has gone," replied Bomba, "and I hope—What is this?"

His quick eye had caught sight of a gleaming object of a cylindrical shape and of about eight inches in length that shone in the grass beside him. He knew that it had not been there a few minutes before. It was like nothing he had ever seen in his jungle life, and he made a quick step toward it.

"Do not touch it, master!" cried Gibo, clutching at his arm. "It is something that the snake has cast forth from his mouth. It is accursed. To touch it means death."

Bomba hesitated. And while the jungle boy

stands there, torn between curiosity and caution, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Bomba was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Bomba could not remember ever having any home but the jungle. Far in the depths of the Amazonian wilderness he had lived since infancy with a white-haired old naturalist named Casson as his sole companion. They dwelt in a hut beside a small stream, and lived on the game and fish that Casson could secure.

Casson was kind and affectionate toward the lad, but he was immersed in his studies and the books he had brought with him to the jungle and for days at a time would scarcely speak at all and then only in monosyllables.

They lived on amicable terms with most of the natives, but the latter held rather aloof from them, for there was something in Casson's brooding and abstraction that made them think he was under a spell, and they usually gave the cabin a wide berth.

In the outdoor life he led, Bomba grew up strong and hardy, and at an unusually early age became adept in the use of the bow and arrow and the machete, the latter of which he knew how to use at close quarters and could also hurl at a distance with deadly effect.

As the boy grew in years and stature and as Casson grew old and feeble, Bomba became the provider for the little family. In hunting for game he came necessarily in conflict with the wild beasts and reptiles of the jungle, but his indomitable heart, the lightning quickness of his mind, his unerring aim, his swiftness of foot and his powerful muscles had thus far stood him in good stead, and he had come through countless perils unscathed.

With the harmless creatures the lonely boy made friends, and grew so familiar with their chatter and their habits that he could understand them and be understood by them. There were Woowoo and Kiki, the parrots, whom he had rescued when they were attacked by Geluk, the puma, the very beast whose skin he was now wearing; Doto, the monkey; and a host of others who took with him the place of human companions. Often when his mind was depressed and his heart sore he sought them out and found comfort in their friendliness and sympathy.

Casson had started to give the lad the rudiments of an education, and Bomba had learned his letters and could even read simple English when a tragedy of the jungle abruptly stopped further progress in knowledge. When an anaconda one day had attacked the boy, Casson had shot at the reptile with an old firearm which ex-

ploded in his grasp. The snake was wounded and retreated, but some of the flying bits of metal had struck Casson in the head, knocking him unconscious. Bomba dragged the old man back to the cabin and nursed him back to physical health, but Casson had been rendered half-demented by the explosion and his memory was almost wholly gone. From that time the whole burden of securing a livelihood was on Bomba's shoulders.

Bomba had a great longing to know who his parents were and whether they were still living and, if so, where. He had questioned Casson on the subject, but the old man had shown a reluctance to discuss the matter and had put off the answers to his questions until Bomba should become older. Then the accident had intervened and Casson, though he tried, could not recollect the past. From disjointed ejaculations and mutterings of Casson, Bomba had conjectured that his mother's name was Laura and that his father's last name was Bartow. Everything else was a sealed book.

Much as Bomba loved the wild free life of the jungle, he knew that he did not belong there. He was white, and the call of the blood tugged at his heart. Somewhere in the great world outside, of which he had heard but vaguely, was his rightful place. Somewhere there were or had been his

own people. He would find them! He would know them!

The curious meeting between Bomba and two white hunters, Gillis and Dorn, the way Bomba saved their camp when it was attacked at night by jaguars, the cunning with which he trapped the dreaded cooanaradi when it sought to bury its fangs in him, the way he met the attack of the terrible head-hunters who had surrounded him and Casson in their cabin, these and many more thrilling occurrences are narrated in the first book of this series, entitled: "Bomba, the Jungle Boy; or, The Old Naturalist's Secret."

At one time when a fraction of his memory had come back to him, Casson had told Bomba that Jojasta, the Medicine Man of the Moving Mountain, knew the secret of his birth and could tell him if he would, and the jungle lad undertook the long and perilous journey to question the cruel, tyrannous old Indian.

In its course he met with such perils of flood and tempest, wild beasts and reptiles, that only his dauntless resolution succeeded in saving him from death.

At last Bomba arrived at the palace of Jojasta, only again to be thwarted in his quest, for the medicine man had been crushed in the fall of his temple and could only mutter with his dying breath that Bomba could gain the information he

sought from Sobrinini, the witch woman, who dwelt beyond the Giant Cataract.

Bitterly disappointed, but not disheartened, Bomba resolved to seek out Sobrinini, despite the terrifying stories that were told of her and her Island of Snakes. He found Sobrinini in her hideous haunt and was able to rescue her from the hands of her subjects, who had been stirred to revolt and were about to take her life.

But this witch woman, who had once been a famous opera singer, was half-crazed and could not yet give him the information for which his soul longed. She did, indeed, confirm the conviction he had already gained from Casson that his father's name was Bartow and his mother's first name was Laura and Bomba also found on her island the picture of a beautiful woman who, he felt sure, was his mother.

From Sobrinini's mutterings, Bomba gathered that Japazy, the half-breed ruler of Jaguar Island, could give him the clew to his parentage. Nothing daunted by his previous failures, he set out for the island, which derived its name from the beasts that dwelt on it in great numbers, and after uncounted perils reached it, only to learn that Japazy had gone to the Abandoned City, a sunken metropolis of ancient times in which great treasures abounded.

The natives of the island held Bomba captive,

awaiting the return of their ruler, and when that return was delayed planned to slay the stranger as an offering to their gods. Never had Bomba been in more desperate plight, but by a clever stratagem he escaped just before the island itself was overwhelmed by a flood.

Bomba saved from drowning a native named Gibo, who became attached to the jungle lad with an almost adoring devotion. Together they sought out the Abandoned City and after long searching found it. But they found that it was a place where terror dwelt and where the infamous half-breed Japazy held his cowering subjects in abject thrall.

Bomba and Gibo fell into his hands, and Japazy, when he learned Bomba's mission, threatened him with torture and death, telling him that he would slay the son as he had already slain the parents. But Bomba believed that Japazy did not speak the truth when he said he had killed the lad's father and mother.

How Bomba escaped and was pursued, the treasure that Bomba carried away with him, including the mysterious book that he hoped contained the knowledge he was seeking, are told about in the preceding book of this series, entitled: "Bomba the Jungle Boy in the Abandoned City; or, 'A Treasure Ten Thousand Years Old."

Now to return to Bomba as he stands over the

mysterious thing that had fallen or been thrown from the monstrous shape that had swept across the sky.

"To touch it is death," again warned Gibo, as he saw that the jungle boy was stooping toward the dreaded object.

But the superstitious Indian had seen death in so many things that Bomba was not especially impressed. Still, it was not without a thrill of foreboding that he took it gingerly between his thumb and forefinger.

Gibo looked for his master to fall dead on the spot, and watched him in an agony of apprehension. But Bomba gazed with intense curiosity at the thing and turned it over and over in his hands. He knew that it was metal, not unlike that used for arrowheads by the natives. It was still warm, as though it had been subjected to friction.

Mechanical objects were rare in the jungle, and Bomba had no idea of its purpose. But the conviction grew on him that it was part of no living thing.

"It is a tooth of the great snake Igmazil," pronounced Gibo.

Bomba did not answer. Some long forgotten memory was coming back to him. What was it that Frank Parkhurst, the white boy whom he had rescued in the jungle, had told him of ships

that flew in the sky? At the time it had seemed incredible to Bomba. But Frank had spoken with such earnestness that it had finally conquered his unbelief.

Could this great thing that he had seen be one of those flying ships? It had surely had something that looked like wings. Yes, Frank had told him, too, that when they were in the air they made a noise like thunder.

But Bomba had thought that such queer things must belong wholly to that wonderful land beyond the sea, the land of the white man. What, then, was it doing over this jungle, inhabited almost wholly by dark-skinned Indians and where white men were seldom seen?

Had there been white men in that flying ship? He had caught no glimpse of a human face. But he knew from Frank's description that the ships did not fly by themselves like a kite, that they were guided by men who knew how to make the ship go.

If there were men there, they must be white. Bomba's heart thrilled at the thought. White as he was white! Brothers by blood!

Again he felt that tug at the very roots of his nature, the cry of the blood, the longing to meet and be with his own people, the same feeling he had had when first he met the white rubber hunters, Gillis and Dorn, and later the Parkhursts.

He looked eagerly at the sky, this time not in dread but in hope. He longed to see, to speak with those white men, those fearless navigators whose skin, whose nature, whose impulses were like his own.

But now that he wanted them they were no longer to be seen, nor could even the faintest buzz be heard to tell him that they were in the vicinity.

"Drop it, master," begged Gibo. "It will turn to fire in Bomba's hand."

"No," said Bomba, as he carefully stowed the queer object in his pouch. "It is a messenger from the skies that has told Bomba many things. Bomba will keep it. Come, let us be on our way."

He picked up his weapons which he had laid down while he was examining the piece of metal and strode off in advance. Gibo followed, but at a greater distance than usual, casting fearful glances at the pouch that held the object he deemed accursed. Brave indeed was his master who dared to tempt the wrath of Igmazil! No good could come of it, Gibo told himself.

Bomba pondered long over the strange occurrence. Then he dismissed it for a time, for other things more pressing were crowding upon his mind.

Chief of these was the difficulty of finding and

keeping the trail. For two days this had puzzled him. He was skilled in jungle lore and could usually find his way unerringly through the most tangled portions. Even at night his sense of direction rarely failed him.

But now he had to confess to himself, though he had not imparted the fact to Gibo, that he was bewildered. It was almost as though he were traveling in a strange country. Old landmarks were wanting. He was in a maze.

The earthquake that had freed him from the power of Japazy seemed to have changed utterly the face of the country. Old trails had been wiped out in the earth's convulsions. There were mountains where formerly had been valleys; valleys where there had been mountains. The very streams had been turned into new courses. All of Bomba's world was topsy-turvy.

More than once in those wanderings after hours of terrible toil, scaling hills, descending into valleys, hacking his way through underbrush where there were no trails, he had found himself on the identical spot he had passed a long time before.

One other thing he found that filled him with vague uneasiness. That was the deadly stillness that prevailed. The parrots in their gorgeous plumage were no longer wheeling about and screaming. The endless chatter of the monkeys

had been hushed. Even the hum of the innumerable insects was stilled. A sense of brooding doom seemed to hang over the jungle.

Added to all this was a strange languor that had come upon him in the last two hours. His steps lagged. There seemed to be no feeling in his legs. His ears were buzzing. His brain was dizzy.

This odd sensation had become apparent only since they had entered a thickly wooded region, the trees of which were different from any that Bomba had ever seen before.

They were tall and dark and sinister and from them seemed to exude a faint sickish odor. The air had lost its vitality and was difficult to breathe.

Gibo had been so engrossed with the mysterious object in Bomba's pouch that he had not noted the district in which they were traveling. Now his glance fell on one of the forbidding trees and a cry of terror came from his lips.

"The colopichi!" he shrieked. "The trees of death!"

CHAPTER III

THE TREES OF DEATH

As the words issued from Gibo's lips, he dropped his bundle and threw himself down to beat his head against the ground.

Bomba, startled by the cry of his companion, halted in his tracks and regarded Gibo with a look of wonder not unmixed with scorn.

"Is this the Gibo who fought with Bomba against the serpents and the alligators?" Bomba asked. "The Gibo who went with Bomba to the Abandoned City, the Gibo who plunged with Bomba through the cataract, the Gibo who fell upon the men of Japazy and overcame them? No, it is another Gibo, a Gibo who cries and trembles and tears his hair like a girl in grief."

"Gibo can fight with beasts and men," replied the native. "But who can fight against the evil gods, the demons who rejoice in bringing sorrow to the hearts of men? They sent Igmazil, and Bomba scorned him. Igmazil threw forth a tooth as a token that he would devour us, and Bomba picked it up as though it were nothing. The gods are angry when Bomba laughs at them, and now

they have brought us to the trees of death."

"The trees of death!" repeated Bomba, as he looked up at the dark trees from which hung crooked, twisted boughs that, as they waved in the wind, looked like clutching fingers. "Death comes not from trees unless the boa constrictor lurks there or the jaguar flattens his body against a bough waiting to spring. Gibo speaks words that have no sense."

"It is not only snakes and jaguars that kill," replied Gibo. "The colopichi tree has a breath of poison. It sends it forth and all things die except the creeping things who carry their poison in their fangs and look upon the colopichi tree as a brother. Does the master see any parrots? Does he see any monkeys? No, for they are wiser than we and go away where the air is pure."

Bomba reflected. The absence of bird and animal life lent some probability to what the Indian had said. Then, too, there was that sickish odor that had already affected his senses. He remembered, too, tales he had heard of poisonous trees in the Amazonian jungle.

"There may be something in what Gibo has said," Bomba conceded. "Bomba and Gibo will make haste to find some part of the jungle where the colopichi tree does not grow. Let Gibo pick up his bundle and follow Bomba."

The Indian obeyed with alacrity, and the two struck out with all speed to get beyond the poison zone.

But this proved easier in plan than in execution. The baleful trees seemed to exist in thousands. The travelers turned to right and left, seeking for some outlet from the infected region, but without avail.

After two hours of this struggle against their surroundings, Bomba paused to get breath.

"It is strange," he muttered. "Bomba has never seen so many trees of the same kind together in the jungle."

"They are demon trees," declared Gibo. "The evil gods have planted them to destroy Bomba and Gibo. It is because Bomba has made light of their power. We are accursed. Even now, if Bomba will make obeisance to the gods and throw away the tooth of Igmazil, they may have pity on us and make the colopichi trees melt into air."

"Bomba bows only to the white man's God," declared the lad proudly. "He will not pray to demons, if there be demons. But if it will put the heart of a man into Gibo again, Bomba will let the thing that came from the bird of the sky fall again to the earth."

He drew the cylindrical piece of metal from his pocket and dropped it on the ground beside

him. Gibo knelt before it, although at a respectful distance, and began a crooning incantation of repentance and obedience.

As the native rose to his feet a distant roll of thunder was heard.

"It is the answer of Igmazil!" cried Gibo joyfully. "He has heard Gibo's prayer and will send the rain to wash the poison from the air and make it clean and sweet. Gibo has heard the elders of his tribe say that it is only when the jungle is dry that the colopichi sends forth its poison. Bomba did well when he took the tooth of Igmazil from his pouch."

A storm was indeed gathering with all the rapidity characteristic of that jungle region. The sky became black with clouds, the thunder was now a continuous roll and jagged sheets of lightning shot across the heavens. A moment later great drops of rain began to fall, portent of the deluge that was to come.

Bomba looked about him anxiously for some place of shelter. It was not so much that he objected to being drenched, for that, with the scanty clothing he wore, was a small matter. But the wind was rising with a growling note which indicated that it might develop into a tornado.

There was nothing that promised refuge in sight, and he and Gibo hurried on, their eyes searching the undergrowth for a place to hide

until the fury of the storm should have passed.

They found it at last, a narrow opening between two overhanging rocks, so narrow that they could squeeze into it only with difficulty. But they were in no mood to be critical, and it sufficed.

Scarcely had they settled down in their close quarters before the windows of heaven were opened and the rain came down in blinding sheets that shut out all view of the surrounding jungle.

The wind increased in violence until it reached the proportions of a gale. Fiercer and fiercer it blew until the great trees bent nearly double under the blasts. Every now and then there came a thunderous crash that told of some monarch of the forest uprooted and hurled to earth.

Conversation between the huddled travelers was impossible in that deafening chorus of sounds. For this, Bomba was not sorry. He had plenty to occupy his thoughts.

The strange occurrences of that day came back to him. Where now was that monstrous bird of the sky? How could it ride the gale and defy the lightning? Perhaps even now it had been brought to the earth with broken wings.

If it should outlive the fury of the elements, Bomba thought, with a tinge of bitterness, the men who guided it were luckier than he. They had the sweet pure air of heaven to breathe, far

above the pestilent colopichi trees that were beginning to inspire him with dread.

What evil chance had brought him into this baleful part of the jungle? Why was it that he, Bomba, so skilled in woodcraft should be unable to find an outlet. Was it indeed, as Gibo had said, that the demon gods were dogging his steps?

But this thought he dismissed as soon as it had entered his mind. Let Gibo shiver and quake in his jungle superstitions. He, Bomba, was white and scorned such childish fancies. Frank Parkhurst, he knew, would have laughed at them. For Frank was white. That made all the difference. And he, Bomba, was white. He clung to this thought as his most precious possession.

Yet, he reflected sadly, what good did it do him to have white blood and white skin and white instincts? What was he after all but a wild jungle boy, his only white associates being Casson and Sobrinini, both of them half-demented?

And how long would he have Casson? Was he still alive in the camp of Hondura or when Bomba got back to the maloca of the friendly chief would he find only Casson's grave?

A long time the lad sat brooding thus while Gibo sat silently beside him with all the stolidity of a jungle Indian.

Presently the storm began to abate. The torrent died down to a drizzle, the roll of the thun-

der subsided into a distant growling, and the lightning retired to its caverns. The wind, too, had spent its fury, and it was safe to venture forth.

If the jungle had been tangled before, it was doubly so now. On every hand were evidences of the wrath of the gale. Great trees had been torn up and lay everywhere. It was a scene of inextricable confusion.

But difficult as this made their progress, their hearts lightened as they noted the increased purity of the air. The rain had washed from the trunks and boughs of the colopichi trees the slimy exudations from which had come that pestilential odor. To be sure, it would gather again as the trees grew dry. But for the present the rain had given the hard-pressed travelers a new chance for life.

"Said not Gibo that the rain would kill the poison?" asked the native exultantly. "What is there that the old men of Gibo's tribe do not know?"

Bomba secretly surmised that there was much that they did not know, but he had to confess that in this instance the argument was with Gibo.

"Igmazil is pleased," went on Gibo. "He will take back his tooth and go back to his dwelling with the gods. It is Gibo's prayers that have done this thing."

"That may be," conceded Bomba, only too well

pleased to see that his companion had thrown off his load of depression. "But now it will soon be dark and we must hasten to get away from this place before the sun dries once more the colopichi trees. The rain may not come again to-morrow."

With muscles rested and hearts lightened, Bomba and the Indian made what way they could through the tangle of undergrowth and fallen trees. They had to make long detours, and their progress was necessarily slow. They had to travel two or three miles to make a net gain of one. It was exhausting work, but they bent to their task and plodded along doggedly.

And ever the colopichi trees cast their sinister shade over them. The region seemed given over to that one particular species of tree.

A ray of hope came to them when the trees thinned out a trifle and before them they beheld an open glade.

"At last!" cried Bomba, as he hastened forward. Now we shall—"

The sentence was never finished.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEN OF SNAKES

EVEN as Bomba spoke the earth seemed to open beneath his feet. He felt himself falling down, down. Then there was a great shock and he knew no more.

How long it was before Bomba returned to consciousness he did not know. Slowly, very slowly, his senses came back to him. He opened his eyes, but could see nothing. All about him was darkness. He moved his arm and felt a sharp twinge of pain. He moved a foot with a similar result. His whole body ached.

Where was he? He strove to gather his scattered senses. Into his dizzy brain came the recollection of his darting forward into the glade, of his feet finding nothing beneath them but empty space. He had fallen into a pit, perhaps some crevice formed by the earthquake that had so recently convulsed all that region.

Cautiously he felt of all his limbs. Though he winced at the touch, they did not seem to be broken.

With tremendous effort he staggered to his

feet, and despite the pain he felt, a thrill of exultation went through him as he realized that he could stand. He swung his arms and found that they responded to his will.

But Gibo! Where was Gibo? He had been close at Bomba's heels at the time of the fall. Had he seen the danger in time and drawn back? Or had he fallen with his leader and perhaps been killed?

"Gibo!" he called. "Gibo! Are you here? It is Bomba that speaks."

There was no reply.

Again Bomba called and this time there was a faint response.

Bomba groped his way in the direction of the sound, and almost stumbled over the prone body of his faithful follower.

"Is Gibo hurt?" the lad cried, falling on his knees besides the inert body.

"Much hurt," came the answer feebly. "It is the end of Gibo. He will never more see the light of day. The gods have called him, and Gibo goes to the place of his fathers."

Bomba's practiced hands, skilled in the rough surgery of the jungle, ran deftly over the native's form. No bones were broken. As to internal injuries, he could not tell.

"Gibo will not die," the lad pronounced, throwing into his tone all the cheerfulness possible

under the circumstances. "He will live to feast and dance in the maloca of Hondura. Come, let Gibo give Bomba his hand and try to stand upon his feet."

He drew the Indian to a standing position and put his arm about him to steady him.

"See!" cried Bomba. "Gibo can stand. He will soon be well. His head is dizzy from his fall, but that will pass. Let Bomba feel of Gibo's arms."

He flexed the muscles of the Indian and they responded.

"It is well!" exclaimed Bomba delightedly. "We shall eat and we shall sleep, and when the morning comes we will climb out of this pit in the earth."

He spoke with a cheeriness that he was very far from feeling, for he knew that he had fallen far and that this pit might well prove to be their tomb. On looking upward, he could catch a faint glimpse of light. It was only faint, for dusk had fallen, but up in the sky Bomba could see a star.

He propped Gibo in a sitting position and set about examining with his hands the character of the shaft down which they had fallen. The walls of the cylindrical hole were of dirt and crumbled at the touch.

This was more encouraging than though it had been of rock, for with his machete it might be

possible for Bomba to cut handholds and footholds in the dirt as he climbed upward.

The attempt would have to be deferred, however, until daylight. Even in his present bruised and exhausted condition, he would have tried it had he been alone. But Gibo had been badly shaken, both physically and mentally, and was in no shape for such arduous work, and the thought of leaving the Indian there did not even enter the mind of Bomba. They would live or die together.

"We will rest until the day comes," the lad told Gibo. "Then Bomba and Gibo will climb to the top. Now we will eat."

They had with them some strips of the roasted tapir meat, and with these they made a meal. They would have given much for water, but there was not a drop to be had, and they had to make the best of things.

Then they stretched out on the ground and slept the sleep of utter weariness and exhaustion, so soundly, indeed, that it was full daylight in the world above them when they woke, as they could see from the rays of the sun that struck the walls of the pit near the top.

Even that distant glimpse of light was heartening. But it also brought a touch of dismay with it, for Bomba could see now that the walls of the pit as they ascended bent over toward each other.

Had they towered up vertically there would be a chance of climbing out, though at the expense of tremendous muscular exertion. As it was, there were places where Bomba would have to be climbing almost like a fly on the ceiling. A fall under those conditions seemed inevitable.

He did not share his forebodings with Gibo, whose eyes were bloodshot from the effects of the fall and could not see clearly. It would be time enough to break the bad news when the trial had been made and had failed.

They ate sparingly, for their store was scanty and for the present, at least, there was no chance of getting more. The thought of possible starvation already cast its shadows over them.

They were about half way through the meal when they heard a distant humming that grew in volume until they recognized it as the same they had heard the day before when the giant bird had swept over them.

They looked at each other, Bomba with speculation in his eyes, while terror shone in Gibo's.

"It is Igmazil coming back to devour us," insisted the Indian, rocking back and forth and covering his face with his hands.

"Cease whining, foolish one," commanded Bomba. "It is not Igmazil, but a sky wagon which white men are driving. If they should come down to earth, they might see this place in which we

have fallen and help us get out to the light of day."

He centered his gaze on the opening above and before long the giant bird swept into his ken. It had checked its headlong speed and was spiraling lazily about as though looking for something below.

An exclamation broke from Bomba's lips as a man peered over the side of the mysterious "sky wagon." There was no mistaking it. It was a human face, and Bomba's hawklike eyes could see the outline clearly, although it was too far off for the lineaments to be distinguished.

"Look up, fearful one," cried Bomba to Gibo, "and see not a snake but a man! Look, and cease thy foolish chattering about Igmazil."

"Gibo cannot see," replied the native. "His eyes are weak. But it may be that Igmazil has taken the shape of a man. The gods can show themselves in many forms."

It was clearly hopeless to try to move the Indian from his theory, and Bomba gave it up. But his eyes remained riveted upon that wonderful contrivance of the white man until it moved slowly out of his view.

The humming still continued, however, and Bomba knew that for some reason it was hovering about the spot. But he had no time for specu-

lation. That could wait until he found himself freed from this living tomb.

"Now," he said to his companion, "Bomba will try to climb to the opening of the pit. He will make holes with his machete in the walls of the pit, and in these he will put his hands and feet. Gibo will follow."

"Gibo will follow," repeated the Indian, as he rose to his feet and threw the precious package containing the jewels over his shoulder.

It was almost ironical, that vast wealth at the bottom of a pit in the Amazonian jungle. A time might come when they would exchange it all gladly for a crust of bread!

Bomba, making sure that his precious book was still with him, began his ascent. He dug out holes in the soft dirt for his hands and feet, and as soon as he had let go of one transferred himself to one still higher.

The work was laborious beyond expression, and was made still more arduous by the frequent caving in of the dirt under his hands, making it necessary to dig new holes in their place. Again and again he slipped and was near to falling, and only his monkeylike quickness and agility saved him from disaster.

It had been at first arranged that Gibo should follow close behind him. But there was such imminent danger that Bomba, if he lost his hold,

would carry Gibo with him in his fall, that it was decided that Gibo should remain at the foot of the hole until Bomba had completed his climb.

Moreover, Bomba thought that if he should emerge safely from the pit, he might be able to make a rope of creepers from a tree and lower it to his companion, who could fasten it under his arms and thus be safe in case he slipped.

Slowly, very slowly, Bomba climbed. He was drenched in perspiration from his exertions. His muscles ached. His hands became almost numb from the effort necessary to preserve his grip. But he kept doggedly on, believing that only in this way lay salvation from his terrible predicament.

It was only when he reached the point just below the inward curve of the wall that his heart misgave him. He saw then, what he had not been able to see clearly before, that he would have to cover a space of at least eight feet in an almost horizontal position with his face to the dirt above him and his back to the ground beneath.

Could it be done? Not by a human being under those conditions. An insect could do it. But Bomba, despite his dauntless heart, knew that he could not defy the law of gravity. He would inevitably fall.

It cost him much to bow to the stern law of

necessity. But when he was at last convinced that his self-imposed task was impossible he retraced his steps until once more he stood beside Gibo.

"Why has the master come back?" asked the Indian.

"Because Bomba could go no farther," answered the lad, as he sank down on the ground to rest his aching limbs. "If Bomba were a fly, he could crawl upside down. But Bomba has not a fly's feet or wings."

Gibo's jaw dropped in consternation.

"Then Bomba and Gibo must stay in this accursed pit and starve!" he exclaimed.

"Bomba did not say that," was the jungle boy's reply. "But we can not go up through that hole that shows the sky. We must find some other way."

Confident as he had been that he could make the climb, Bomba had not yet explored the place in which he found himself immured. How large it was he did not know. But now, with starvation threatening him, he must know.

The only light they had was that which came from the opening and when they moved away from directly beneath it they found themselves in darkness.

If there had been wood of any kind about, Bomba would have struck a spark with flint and

steel and made a torch. But there was none, and he was compelled to rely solely on his sense of touch.

As he went forward, with Gibo close upon his heels, he dreaded at any moment coming up against a blank wall. Then indeed their fate would have been sealed, and they would be doomed to die like rats in a trap.

His hopes grew, however, as no such obstacle met his groping hands. For a little distance he found that he was in a narrow tunnel, so narrow that he could touch both sides at once with his extended hands.

Then, with his right hand touching the wall, he found that his left was groping in empty space. The passage was widening.

With nothing to indicate whether it would be safer to follow the right or left side wall, he chose the right at random and hugged it closely as he went along.

His conviction grew as he progressed that he was in a cavern of possibly great dimensions, formed by an earthquake.

He stopped and called aloud, and the answering echo told him that it had been sent back from a long distance.

This was comforting, for it increased his chances of ultimate escape. The bigger the place was the more likelihood existed that somewhere

he might find a rift in the earth that would lead to the upper air. In the journeyings of the last few days he had come across many yawning chasms that extended deeper than his sight could reach. One of these, if he could find it, might prove his salvation.

Gibo followed close behind him, seldom speaking except to assure himself that Bomba was close to him. He had given himself up as lost. He considered himself a dead man. Brave as a lion, as he had many times proved in his contests with men and beasts—something he could see and understand—his courage failed when superstition entered. Who could fight against the demon gods? And under their curse he believed he rested. He moved like an automaton, hope dead, his senses numbed.

Bomba was made of different stuff. Fear was practically unknown to him. Desperate as he knew their situation to be, he did not for one instant relinquish hope. He had been in so many tight places and pulled himself out of them that it had begotten in him a self-confidence that never wavered, and he was never so cool, so alert, so indomitable as when the danger was greatest.

He moved along with the utmost caution, for he did not know at what instant he might find himself on the brink of a precipice. He never put down his foot without first feeling that it

was solid ground on which he was stepping.

He had reason to bless this caution, for once as he extended his foot he felt a draught of air that warned him of an abyss beneath. Instantly he drew back and, falling on his knees, felt with his hands the sharp brink of the chasm.

He picked up a stone from the path and threw it over the edge. The time that elapsed before it struck a rock below told him that it had traveled nearly a thousand feet.

Still on hands and knees, he crept, with Gibo following, along the rim until he found a place where the edges of the chasm came together. The yawning chasm was deep but not wide. Once on the other side, the travelers rose to their feet and, warned by their narrow escape, went on with redoubled caution.

A few minutes later Gibo gave a cry of alarm.

"What is it, Gibo?" asked Bomba, halting abruptly.

"Gibo stepped on something that moved under his feet," replied the native shiveringly. "It was a snake!"

Bomba listened. His hearing, sharpened by his experiences in the jungle, was of preternatural acuteness.

There was a faint slithering sound, something softer, silkier than the rustling of the finest cloth or tissue paper, so gentle that it would have

passed unnoticed by any ears but Bomba's.

He knew what it was. He had heard it too often to be mistaken. That faint crepitation marked the progress of a snake! Gibo had been right.

As rigid as a statue, Bomba stood until the last rustling had died away. The reptile had reached its hole and drawn itself into it.

A new terror was added now to that perilous journey. Where there was one snake there were probably more. At any moment there might come a lightning stroke, and venomous fangs would be imbedded in their flesh.

There was danger enough in facing any snake in broad daylight. But then one would have a chance to fight. He could see his enemy, avoid its attack, and launch one of his own. But in this black darkness they were helpless.

Still, Bomba refused to quail. Moreover, he had no choice. To stand still was death. To go back was death. He must go forward.

"We are doomed, master!" exclaimed Gibo.

"Only the coward is doomed," replied Bomba sharply. "Come! Follow Bomba." He led the way, and Gibo had no choice but to press on behind him.

The tunnel developed into a maze of passages, a veritable catacomb. Paths diverged to right and left and there was nothing to indicate which

was the best one to choose. They had become the mere playthings of Fate!

A little farther on the sound of rushing waters came to their ears, and before long they found themselves on the brink of a deep gorge at whose bottom the torrent ran.

Somewhere there must be an outlet. The thought came to Bomba that, as a last resort, a forlorn hope, they might entrust themselves to the stream and let it carry them where it would, on the chance that it would bring them to the light of day.

But for all he knew it might run underground for miles and in places so fill its narrow channel that the swimmers would be submerged and drowned. Time enough to try that when everything else had failed.

They skirted the edge of the gorge as far as it extended and then got on the other side and continued their journey.

For hours, each one of which seemed a day, they wandered on, hope growing weaker with every rod they traversed.

At last Bomba halted.

"We will eat, Gibo," he announced. "Bring from the pack one strip of tapir meat and we will divide it in two. Now we must eat but little, for it may be long before the arrows of Bomba can bring another beast to earth."

Gibo obeyed, and they ate their scanty meal in silence. Neither was inclined to talk, although from time to time Gibo muttered an incantation to his gods.

With their hunger far from satisfied, but with their bodies somewhat rested and refreshed, they pressed forward again.

In turning to speak to his companion a little while later, Bomba was surprised to note that he could see the outline of Gibo's figure, though he could not discern his features. Previously he would not have even known that the Indian was there except for his footsteps and his voice.

A thrill shot through the jungle lad. If he could see, there must be light coming from somewhere. Yet it had come so faintly that he had not been conscious of it.

"Light, Gibo!" he cried exultantly. "And where can light come from, if not from the sun? Can you see from what direction it comes?"

"No, master," replied Gibo, for the first time a note of hope in his voice. "Yet it is here."

"And it was not here when we ate the tapir meat!" exclaimed Bomba. "It has come as we have walked. It is somewhere in front of us. Let not your feet lag. Let us hurry."

They could hasten now, for they could see where to set their feet. As they hurried on, the dim suffusion of light became brighter, and as

they rounded a bend in the tunnel an exclamation of rapture broke from both.

There was sunlight, the blessed sunlight that they had feared they never would see again, streaming through a wide break in the cavern roof!

They rushed forward, shouting wildly.

But the shouts died away almost as soon as they had left their lips. Directly in the path that led to freedom was what seemed to be a sea of snakes, snakes by the dozens, snakes by the score, squirming, tangled masses of the most venomous reptiles of the Brazilian jungle!

CHAPTER V

DEADLY ENEMIES

THE sight of the writhing reptiles rooted Bomba and Gibo to the earth, paralyzed them with horror.

But only for one moment. The next they leaped backward, where from a safe distance they could look over the ground and determine what was next to be done.

"They are the brood of Igmazil," groaned Gibo. "He has sent them for our destruction. Of what avail to flee from the pursuit of the demon gods?"

"Hush, foolish one," commanded Bomba. "Bomba would think."

He scanned the writhing mass in front of him. He saw among them the jararaca and the cooanaradi, whose bite was certain death. And there were scores of them, wallowing in the mud and slime of what had been a large pool but was now almost dry.

There was none of the monster snakes, the boa constrictors and the anacondas. Those lords of the reptile world played a lone hand and dis-

dained to mingle with their lesser brethren.

Bomba fingered the bow at his side and half drew an arrow from its quiver. That arrow, sent with all the force of his muscular arm into that squirming mass, would have transfixed several of the reptiles at once. But he had not many arrows, and all of them together would have accounted for but a few of the host.

No, the arrows would not do, and Bomba withdrew his hand from the bow.

What was to be done? The reptiles seemed to occupy all the space through which they must pass to reach that tantalizing rent in the cavern wall that beckoned them to liberty while they were powerless to accept its invitation.

With desperation Bomba's eyes swept every inch of the space before him and around him.

Then he saw something that had previously escaped his notice. At the right of the tunnel was a rocky declivity seamed with holes. A rough shelf of rock wound alongside the cliff, formed by one of the freaks of the earthquake. In places it formed a platform several feet in width. In others it narrowed to a width of not more than six inches, and one would have to hug the face of the cliff closely to avoid falling.

Bomba did not like the looks of those holes in the rock. Each one of them was probably the home of some snake, whither it returned after

it was tired of disporting itself with its comrades in the slime.

How many of them were in their holes, he could not know. From any of the holes as he passed an ugly head might dart and fasten itself upon him or his companion.

But desperate cases required desperate remedies, and Bomba did not long hesitate. He must take the risk. And he must take it promptly. Already there was an ominous movement in that writhing mass. Some of the snakes had discovered the presence of the intruders, and the rattles of the jararacas were sounding the alarm. A score of heads were upraised and twice that number of malignant eyes were fixed upon them, while slimy bodies drew themselves clear of the tangle.

"Gibo," said Bomba to his companion, as he pointed to the slippery path along the side of the declivity, "that is the road that Bomba and Gibo must take. Now is the time for Gibo to prove that he is a man, the same man who fought so bravely by the side of Bomba in the Abandoned City. Gibo knows, as Bomba knows, that there may be snakes in those holes in the cliff and that they may try to strike. Yet we must go that way. What does Gibo say?"

"Gibo will fight with Bomba," cried the Indian, all his natural courage returning now that he was

facing a fight with foes whose habits he understood.

"It is well. Gibo has his spear, but he will not use it as a spear. It shall be his club. Bomba has his machete. Come. Move softly that we disturb not the snakes if they should sleep. And beware lest your foot slips, for the road is narrow and wet with the slime of the snakes."

With the utmost caution Bomba led the way and Gibo followed close behind, holding his spear near its head so that its heavy haft might be used as a club if necessity should arise.

They ascended slowly, their nerves strung to the highest pitch. Under any circumstances the climb would have been dangerous, for it required the sureness of foot of mountain goats to avoid a slip. And now, when at any moment venomous fangs might dart out from the holes along the way, it required almost superhuman skill and courage to hold themselves in grip.

At times they had to turn their faces and breasts toward the cliff and hug it tightly as they moved along sideways, feeling for the narrow ledge that for the moment they could not see. And ever the dread was with them that they might come to a spot where the path ceased altogether and further progress would be impossible.

They had covered about a third of that night-

mare journey when, with the speed of light, an ugly, triangular head flashed out from a hole Bomba was passing and struck the lad's breast with a vicious thud.

It was a cooanaradi, the most vicious serpent of the jungle, the snake that, unlike most others, kills for the mere love of killing, that pursues a traveler even when not threatened with attack.

Its whole ten feet of length had followed the head and quickly coiled about Bomba's legs.

"Master! Master!" cried Gibo in anguish, as he raised his club to dash it against the serpent's coils.

But quick as he was, Bomba was quicker.

The shock of the attack had almost knocked the jungle boy from his feet. But he recovered himself instantly, and with one downward sweep of his knife sliced the snake's head from its body.

Blood spurted from the severed neck and the coils unloosed and fell in a convulsed heap at Bomba's feet.

But the head did not fall.

"Master!" cried Gibo in an agony of apprehension. "He has bitten you. His fangs have struck."

"No, Gibo, be not afraid," replied Bomba coolly. "The cooanaradi buried its fangs only in the puma skin. See, Bomba has not even a scratch," and he thrust the puma skin aside and

displayed his unmarked breast to his companion. "Geluk, the puma, has done Bomba a good turn."

"Now thanks be to the gods!" cried the faithful Indian fervently. "If the cooanaradi's fangs had even scratched the skin, Bomba's place would have been with the dead."

"Bomba knows that well," said the lad, as he wrenched the horrid head loose from the puma skin and threw it from him with a shudder of repulsion. "It is a good sign, Gibo. Our turn to die has not yet come."

Twice more in the course of that perilous trip a similar quick flash came from those ominous holes. But these were jararacas, and their angry rattle had given warning. When the heads protruded Gibo had his club poised and dashed them to pulp.

Before long the most dangerous part of the path had been traversed, and as the path broadened considerably the travelers were enabled to make more rapid progress.

They were nearing the rent in the cavern's ceiling through which the sunlight streamed when a cry from Gibo made Bomba turn quickly. His blood froze with horror.

Gibo's foot had slipped and his body had slid over the edge of the precipice!

In falling, he had thrown out his hands despairingly and had managed to catch hold of a

small rock near the edge of the chasm. There he hung, suspended directly over that part of the depression in which the snakes were thickest. If he went down, he would plunge directly into that writhing mass.

The stone to which he held was not a large one, and now, under the impulsion of Gibo's weight, it was slipping toward the brink. A few seconds more and Gibo and the stone would go down together.

With one bound Bomba reached the spot and, falling on his knees, reached out and caught Gibo's wrists just as the stone slipped over the edge, narrowly missing the Indian in its fall.

Gibo's full weight was hanging on Bomba's hands, and in the awkward position of the latter his muscles were taxed to the utmost. He had no purchase, nothing against which to brace.

To add to this, the rock shelf was slippery, and Bomba felt himself being gradually drawn forward. It seemed inevitable that the snakes would have two victims instead of one unless Bomba should release his hold.

"Can Gibo find any place on which to rest his feet?" asked Bomba.

The Indian tested with his feet the face of the chasm and gave a groan.

"It is like glass," he answered. "The feet of Gibo can find no resting place."

With all his strength Bomba strove to pull his companion up beside him. But after a few moments of superhuman effort he was conscious that he had made no gain and was even himself a little nearer the edge of the ledge.

Gibo, looking up, read the truth in Bomba's agonized face.

"Let me go, master," he cried. "It is better that one should die than both. Let me go."

"No, Gibo," panted Bomba. "Bomba will not let go. If Gibo falls, Bomba will go down with him."

Beneath, the reptiles had sensed the condition of things, and were looking upward with seeming gloating and anticipation.

Inch by inch Bomba's body was drawn toward the brink. With his knees and toes he sought to press upon the shelf to retard, if he could not avert, the terrible doom that stared at him from the myriad reptile eyes.

His dragging feet caught in a crevice of the shelf. Caught and held!

A thrill of hope went through him. Now he had the purchase that he wanted. The snakes might yet be cheated of their prey.

Summoning all his strength for one supreme effort, he pulled backward, dreading every instant lest his feet should slip and rob him of his leverage.

But his toe-grip held. Gradually his tortured muscles drew the native upward. Then he transferred the clutch of his left hand from Gibo's wrist to his upper arm and followed with the right.

This gave Gibo's muscles something to work on, and he was able to supplement his companion's efforts. His face appeared above the edge of the rock ledge. Then his elbows were able to rest on the shelf and support the weight of his body.

This gave Bomba a moment of respite and a chance to rest his arms. Then he renewed his efforts and, with Gibo aiding, the Indian was finally drawn on the shelf to safety.

For a time neither of them could speak. They lay there gasping and shaken, exhausted by their fearful battle with death.

It was Gibo who first broke the silence.

"The master would have died with Gibo," he murmured brokenly. "He could have saved himself by letting Gibo go, but he would not. Gibo will not forget."

Bomba smiled.

"Gibo would have done as much for Bomba," he replied simply. "We are comrades in life and in death."

Spent as they were by their terrific exertions, they dared not tarry. Death lurked in that snake-

infested region and they were frantic to get free from it.

They dragged themselves to their feet and resumed their journey. The break in the cavern's roof beckoned them on and their hearts leaped as they came nearer. Now it was only a hundred yards away with the blessed sunshine streaming through it.

"The light! The light!" cried Bomba jubilantly, as they rounded a bend in the path. "Hasten, Gibo. Now we shall once more see the sky. Now we shall—"

His exultant chant ended in a groan.

They had reached the end of the path! Before them was a yawning chasm!

CHAPTER VI

A DESPERATE LEAP

If it had been possible for Bomba to yield to despair and give up the fight for release, that would have been the moment.

After enduring all the perils of that frightful climb, to find themselves thwarted at the very time that escape seemed certain!

That they were at the very end of their resources seemed not open to doubt. The abyss before them was so deep that they could not see the bottom. The walls were like glass, and it was impossible to dream of descending on one side and climbing up on the other. It was equally impossible to jump across the gap, which in its narrowest part was at least forty feet wide.

It was maddening to gaze across that chasm and see freedom just on the other side. For from where they stood it could be seen that there was an easy ascent to the opening that admitted the sunlight. That opening was sufficiently wide for them to have swung themselves through without the slightest difficulty.

Yet, at the moment, it seemed that that open-

ing might as well be a hundred miles away instead of as many yards. How could they get across the chasm?

"It is the end, master," the Indian stated. "Here we can stay and starve. If we go back, it is to the snakes. It would be quicker death if Bomba and Gibo should throw themselves down into this chasm at our feet."

Bomba did not answer. His eyes were darting over his surroundings.

They noted a great mass of earth that had evidently been hurled through the break in the earth's surface at the time of the earthquake.

In this stood a tree that had been sent down with the huge heap in which its roots were still embedded. But those roots had been largely torn from their grip in the soil, and the tree barely remained upright, swaying slightly in the direction of the chasm. It looked to Bomba as though only a slight effort would be necessary to dislodge it altogether. Might it not serve as a bridge across the gap?

"Take heart, O trembling one!" the lad exclaimed. "See that tree? It is ready to fall. Look! Bomba puts his hand on it. It moves."

It did indeed yield to the touch, and it was evident that but slight effort would be required to make it topple.

A light came into the Indian's eyes.

"The thoughts of Bomba are wise!" he exclaimed. "They move as quickly as the jararaca strikes."

He put his hands upon the tree and prepared to heave against it with his shoulders, but Bomba restrained him.

"Wait!" the jungle boy commanded. "Bomba must first measure the tree with his eyes and see if it is tall enough to reach the other side when it falls."

He was so accustomed to measuring heights and distances that a rod and rule could not have been more accurate.

He scanned the tree from its foundation to the topmost branch. Then he measured the width of the chasm.

Three times he repeated the comparison, and then the sickening certainty forced itself upon him that the gap was wider than the tree was tall.

If the tree fell, it would come short by at least five feet of reaching the other side. It would go thundering down into the abyss!

Gibo had been watching him eagerly, and he read the bafflement in Bomba's face. He did not need to hear the verdict.

"The tree will not reach," declared Bomba.

Gibo broke forth in the death song of his tribe. Bomba turned on him savagely.

"Cease wailing, O heart of water!" he commanded. "Is not Bomba in the same danger? But does he weep and moan like an infant? Let your tongue be silent while Bomba thinks."

Think desperately the lad did, but for a long time without result. It seemed to him that he had at last met a problem that was beyond solution.

Then, like a flash of light, a thought came to him that made his pulses quicken. He weighed it in all its aspects. He had to admit that it was a forlorn hope, the counsel of desperation. The chances were against it. Still it was a chance, and with certain death facing him otherwise he had to take it.

"Gibo," he said slowly, "you have seen a stone cast from a sling?"

"Yes, master," was the wondering reply.

"And the stone goes far, though the sling remains in the hand," went on Bomba, studying his companion's face. "Bomba and Gibo will be the stones. The tree will be the sling."

Utter bewilderment showed in Gibo's face.

"The tree is near to falling," Bomba explained. "Bomba and Gibo will dig away a little more of the dirt from the roots on the under side, so as to make sure that it will fall over the chasm. Then Bomba and Gibo will climb the tree to its topmost boughs and shake the tree back and forth

till the roots give way and it falls over."

"It will carry Bomba and Gibo to death!" exclaimed the Indian. "It cannot reach the other side."

"Did I not say it would be a sling?" replied Bomba. "The tree will go over fast and hurl us far. When it is near the other side, Bomba and Gibo will jump as the jaguar leaps and perchance escape with life, though with many bruises."

Gibo grasped the plan and his gloom disappeared. It was taking a fearful chance, as he well knew. But it had at least a possibility of success, though it would require the most delicate calculation.

"Bomba will shout when the time comes to loose the hold on the tree and jump," said the jungle boy. "Let us now loosen the dirt about the roots."

They did this with the greatest care and with repeated testings of the hold the roots still had on the earth. Then, when they dared go no further in this direction, they cautiously climbed the tree until they had found positions in the topmost boughs where they would have a clear space for their leap and would not interfere with each other.

Their hearts had been in their mouths as they ascended, for the tree had shivered like an aspen

beneath their weight, and the slightest brusque or impetuous movement might have precipitated its fall before they were ready.

Now, with every muscle tensed, they stood in their chosen perches.

The tree was shuddering, as though it shrank from the awful fall into the yawning abyss below.

Gently, very gently, Bomba swayed his body back and forth to shake the tree's last grip on the soil.

It yielded, toppled, and fell out into space!

CHAPTER VII

TERRIBLE JAWS

"Now!" shouted Bomba, as the tree, having described part of an arc, fell with lightning speed downward.

Like a catapult he launched himself from his perch, his leap accelerated by the momentum of the tree.

Gibo jumped at the same instant.

They struck on the further bank of the chasm with terrific force, landing on their feet and then rolling over and over like rubber balls.

Had they hit on solid rock, they would inevitably have been maimed or killed. But luckily, they struck on heaps of soft dirt, and while considerably shaken they were otherwise uninjured.

"Gibo!" shouted Bomba, as he got himself in a sitting position and dashed the dirt from his eyes and mouth. "Is Gibo here?"

"Here, master," cried the Indian jubilantly, as he scrambled over and threw himself at Bomba's feet. "Once more has Bomba delivered Gibo from death. There is none so great and wise as Bomba. He is lord of the jungle."

Bomba smiled at the panegyric. He could smile now. A little while before it would have been impossible. In his heart was a feeling of inexpressible thankfulness.

He felt for the little book beneath the puma skin. His heart leaped as he found that it was still there. He had feared that it had been torn from its thongs in that last fearful leap.

His knife too was at his belt and his bow slung over his shoulder. And Gibo, too, with the instinct of the jungle dweller to preserve at all costs his weapon, had not relinquished his grasp on his spear until he had been compelled to when he struck the ground. It lay now a little way from him, and he hastened to regain it.

They were sore and bruised from the shaking up they had experienced, but the two adventurers did not stop long for rest. There would be plenty of time for that when they reached the upper air. They were eager to get out into the sunshine.

There was nothing in their path now to hinder them. The way was rough and studded with rocks and mounds of earth, but these were nothing to the hardy travelers as long as the road led to freedom.

They could see that when they should come directly under the cleft in the earth's surface they would be within eight feet from the jagged edges that protruded on each side of it.

By climbing up on Gibo's shoulders, Bomba could easily get a grip on those edges and swing himself out. Then he could reach down and give a hand to the Indian.

They had almost reached their goal when Bomba paused abruptly and viewed with marked disfavor a curious feature of the ground before him.

It was a shallow depression, circular in shape, and marked with ridges as though heavy coils of rope had rested there.

He had seen such things before and recognized it instantly. It was the wallow of an anaconda, the nest in which it lay when not abroad in search of its prey! He and Gibo looked at each other. There was no need of explanations. Gibo was as familiar with it as Bomba.

"The master of the snakes!" murmured the Indian, as he looked about him.

At the moment they heard a hoarse sound not far away, and the sound of a heavy body being dragged slowly over the ground above.

"The anaconda comes!" exclaimed Gibo. "He has made his kill and comes home to rest. He will find us here and his wrath will be terrible."

"Let him come," muttered Bomba, as he fitted an arrow to his string. "He comes to his death. Let Gibo stand ready with his spear in case Bomba's arrow fails to reach its mark."

They waited, scarcely daring to breathe, their eyes glued on the break in the earth where the horrid head might be expected to appear.

But it did not appear, and after half an hour, during which their nerves had been screwed to the highest tension, Bomba relaxed from his expectant attitude.

"The lord of all the snakes comes not," he said to Gibo. "Perhaps he slumbers at the edge of his hole. But Bomba can see from the way the light falls through the hole that the day is waning. The sun will soon have sunk to rest beyond the treetops. Then will black darkness come into this place and we shall be helpless, for the anaconda can see better than we can in the dark."

"It is true, master," assented Gibo. "But what can Bomba and Gibo do but wait? If Bomba but raise his head above the cleft in the roof, he may find the eyes of the anaconda looking into his. Then what can Bomba do? The stroke of the lightning is not more swift than the flash of the anaconda's fangs."

"Gibo speaks words of wisdom," conceded Bomba. "Nevertheless, Bomba must find out the truth. If the master of all the snakes is not here, Bomba and Gibo can climb out on the earth and be safe from his attack. If the anaconda is there watching at the opening of the hole, it is best that

Bomba and Gibo should know. Then can they take means to bring the anaconda to the place of death."

The wisdom of this was beyond debate, despite the terrible risks involved.

It was characteristic of the jungle boy that he never for a moment thought of asking or commanding Gibo to take the initiative. He assumed, as a matter of course, that he himself should bear the risk.

They proceeded to a place directly beneath the rift in the earth, and there Bomba divested himself of his bow and arrows and took his knife between his teeth.

"Bend your back, Gibo," he directed his companion. "Hold it stiff that Bomba may mount till his head shall be above the hole in the earth and his eyes see what lies beyond. If the anaconda is not in sight, Bomba will climb out and reach down his hand for Gibo to do the same. But if the master of the snakes is guarding his hole, Bomba will drop as the tree drops when the lightning strikes, and then Bomba and Gibo will plan to bring about the death of the lord of the snakes."

With much inward perturbation but without open protest, Gibo did as directed. Bomba mounted on the bent back of his companion, and with infinite precaution lifted his head inch by

inch until it had cleared the rift in the cavern roof and his eyes rested on the surrounding country.

The breath of fresh air that came to him after the noisome and fetid atmosphere of the cavern was delightful beyond all words. He longed to fill his lungs with it, to revel in its freshness and sweetness. But the sight that met his eyes as they swept around with the quickness of a flash of lightning drove all such thoughts from his mind.

There, within a stone's throw of the opening, lay a huge anaconda, at least thirty feet in length. It was in a coil, and apparently the hideous creature was asleep. Its coils, thicker than a man's arm, rose and fell with the quiet breathing of the reptile, and the head was concealed from sight in the folds.

Evidently the reptile, perhaps glutted with the feast it had made that day upon some unwary beast or man, had decided to bask in the warm rays of the setting sun before seeking its quarters for the night.

Bomba had used such stealth in raising his head above the hole that no sound had come to the reptile's ears. It still lay inert and somnolent, unaware of the intruder into the realm where it ruled as lord and master.

Bomba reflected. He knew how sensitive the

monster would be to the slightest sound. The inevitable noise occasioned by his attempt to swing himself out to the solid ground, the mere shaking of the ground that would occur during the process of lifting his companion up, would start the huge snake at once into vigorous life. A flash of its great head, and it would grip the rash adventurer and its crushing coils would do the rest.

Bomba's plain of action was formed on the instant, and with him to think was to act.

He must kill that menace to his life!

Back under the rent, he would have the advantage of surprise. The monster, suddenly aroused from sleep, would be for a moment disconcerted and bewildered. And in that moment Bomba's iron nerve and unerring aim would find their account.

Raising his voice, Bomba shouted with all the power of his lungs.

There was a convulsive start in the huge coils and like lightning the anaconda raised its head and looked around for its enemy.

Its glaring eyes caught sight of Bomba. The lad might have dropped beneath the opening before the reptile saw him, but this was not in the jungle boy's plans. He was deliberately inviting attack.

A horrible hiss came from the anaconda's

throat, and with open jaws he struck at the target that the lad's head offered. But the target was not there!

Like a flash Bomba had dropped to the earth, sliding from the back with which Gibo had supported him.

"Quick, Gibo!" commanded Bomba. "The lord of all the snakes comes. Stand ready with your spear while Bomba fits an arrow to the string."

Quick as lightning, Bomba had picked up his bow and adjusted an arrow, while Gibo stood with his heavy spear poised ready for action.

An instant later a shadow came between them and the sun, a fearsome shadow, the hideous head of the anaconda with slavering jaws wide open, while its eyes surveyed the daring figures that had challenged it to battle.

A moment's view and it sensed the situation. Then the horrid head, the awful, dripping jaws wide open, lowered itself into the hole and the body followed, rolling in billow-like undulations.

Twang! Bomba's arrow sang through the air!

CHAPTER VIII

PURSUED BY ALLIGATORS

THE arrow sent from Bomba's bow pierced the anaconda's throat and protruded on the further side.

At the same instant Gibo's spear left his hand and pinned one of the heavy coils against the cavern's wall.

Either one of the blows was mortal. The huge snake thrashed and floundered about, and the remnant of its coils came crashing down through the rent and beat wildly upon the ground. The lord of the reptile world had met its fate.

Only when the eyes began to glaze did Bomba and Gibo venture to draw near. Then the knife of Bomba severed the snake's head from its body.

"We have conquered, master," cried Gibo jubilantly, as he spurned the severed head with his foot.

"It is even so," acquiesced Bomba, as he wiped his knife and returned it to its sheath. "But the mate of the anaconda may be near, and it would be well for us to get up on the earth before the sunlight fades."

They pushed the now inert coils from their path. Bomba again availed himself of Gibo's back, and when he had swung himself above the cleft he reached down and enabled Gibo to do likewise.

"Did Bomba not say that only the coward was doomed?" asked the jungle lad, as he looked at his companion. "The gods are on the side of the mortal who will not give way to fear. This is a wise saying, and it would be well for Gibo to take it to heart."

"Bomba speaks well," admitted the native humbly. "But Bomba acts as well as speaks. Else would the bodies of Bomba and Gibo have been long since the prey of snakes. If Gibo feared, it was only because he thought the gods were angry at him and had sent Igmazil to do their vengeance."

"Bomba has no fault to find with Gibo," replied the lad. "He knows that Gibo's heart, save when he cowers before his gods, is brave like that of the puma when she guards her cubs. But now the skies are darkening, and it would be well to get away from this place of evil, lest the anaconda should come to seek its mate. It would not be well to face it in the dark."

Gibo needed no urging to get far from the place he deemed accursed, and the twain put as great a distance as possible between themselves

and it until the gathering darkness brought an end to their journeying for the day.

They gathered wood and made a roaring fire to keep the beasts of the jungle away through the night. Then Gibo brought forth his remaining store of tapir meat and they ate more heartily than they had dared to when they had been threatened with starvation.

Yet they did not feast lavishly, for they knew not how long a stretch of jungle wandering lay before them ere they should come upon the village of Hondura, and the remarkable scarcity of game they had noted in that section of the jungle held little promise of fresh meat.

After the meal they sat some time by the fire before seeking sleep. Gibo kept up a subdued chanting that Bomba knew was in the nature of a thanksgiving hymn to his gods.

Bomba was less voluble but none the less grateful for his preservation. He drew from it an omen that fortified his heart. Surely, if he had been marked for death, there had been plenty of opportunities for it to come to him that day. Yet, though its skeleton fingers had approached very close, they had not fastened upon him. The fortune that favors the brave had been with him.

Finally they replenished the fire so that it would be sure to burn through the greater part of the night and forced their way into the recesses of a

thorn thicket where they lay down to sleep, knowing that no puma or jaguar would venture into so formidable an enclosure.

They slept heavily and were awake at the first streak of dawn, for they wanted to cover as many miles as possible before the heat of the day became oppressive.

Their breakfast, though scanty, diminished still further their small stock of food, and they kept on the alert for any sight of game. But none came in sight. Even a vulture, tough and repellent as its meat was, would have been welcome. Ordinarily they were common enough sights, pausing in their flight to rest on the topmost branches of a tree. But now the fowls of the air as well as the beasts of the earth gave that sinister section a wide berth.

They were still in the district of the baleful colopichi trees. There seemed no end to them. Bomba had hoped that the long underground journey would have taken him and his companion out of the region they affected. But they were as thick as ever. The torrential rain that had sweetened the air two days before had been followed by a day of intense heat and the poisonous gum was beginning again to exude from the trees. The sickish odor was as yet not much in evidence, but Bomba knew that it would grow more pungent with every hour that passed.

A grim testimonial to its poisonous power was the body of a small peccary that lay a little way off from the line they were following. Bomba went over to it, hoping that, if it had been but recently killed, it might be available for food.

But a mere glance at the body, swollen to twice its natural size, put that out of the question. Nothing but poison could have swelled it to that extent. But there were no marks of a serpent's fangs.

There was but one conclusion. The creature had wandered into the district and fallen a victim to the poison of the colopichi trees.

Gibo looked soberly at Bomba and fathomed his thought.

"Yes, master," he said, "the trees of death have slain the peccary. See how black it is! The old men of the tribe say that all turn black who die beneath these trees. They are accursed of the gods."

As the heat of the day increased the pestilential power of the forbidding trees made itself more and more apparent. The same sensation of dizziness that Bomba had felt when first entrapped in this noxious section came upon him again. He almost dreaded to breathe, knowing that with every breath he was drawing poison into his lungs.

His thoughts were getting confused, his vision

blurred. His feet felt as though invisible hands were dragging at them seeking to hold him back.

There was an almost irresistible impulse to sit down and drowse, to surrender to sleep. He fought desperately against this, knowing that if his eyelids once closed they might never open again.

Gibo was similarly affected. He lagged along with uncertain steps, staggering at times, and a film over his eyes showed that he scarcely knew what he was doing.

The sound of waters came to Bomba's ears. At first he thought that he might be the victim of delirium. He shook his head and cleared for a moment his reeling brain by sheer force of resolution.

Now he knew that he heard the lapping of waves upon a beach of sand and shingle. He rushed to Gibo and shook his arm violently.

"It is water, Gibo!" he cried. "Does Gibo not hear it? Where there is water the air is purer. Come!"

"Gibo would rest," came the answer in a dreamy tone. "Gibo is tired."

Again Bomba shook the half-dazed Indian until his teeth rattled.

"Hasten, I say," he commanded, in a tone whose knife edge started Gibo into sudden life.

Under the compulsion of the jungle boy's voice

and his clutching hands, Gibo threw off to some extent the lethargy that was gaining upon him and stumbled along in the direction that Bomba took.

In a few minutes they emerged from the baleful forest and stood on the bank of a wide stream, whose yellowish waters had been swelled by the recent rains until it was running bank full.

It was a welcome sight, but more welcome still was the current of sweet, cool air that swept over the surface and brought fresh life into the fevered veins of the travelers.

They drank in deep draughts of it and could feel their drugged condition vanishing. Then they dipped their heads into the cooling water and let it run down over their heated bodies. It was like a last-minute respite to victims condemned to death.

"And look, Gibo!" cried Bomba eagerly, pointing to the other side of the stream. "Those are not colopichi trees that stand on that bank. They are the trees of health, such as those near the maloca of Hondura. There are monkeys in those trees. Bomba's eyes can see them. And do you not hear the screams of the parrots? There is no evil in those trees, or the apes and birds would not dwell in them. We must cross the stream."

"Yes, master, but how?" queried Gibo. "We have no boat. It is a long swim and the current

is strong. The piranhas will cut the flesh from our bones and there may be alligators in the river."

"We will not swim. Here are logs," and Bomba pointed to the remains of trees that had been leveled by tornadoes and lay scattered about the river bank. "We will bind them together with withes and creepers and they will serve as a raft. Bomba will then make paddles with his machete. Work quickly, Gibo, that we may get away from this land of the colopichi trees."

They set to work at once and soon had a rude platform of logs securely bound together with withes. From boughs of the trees Bomba dexterously fashioned paddles, and they were ready to embark.

They dragged the raft to the river's edge and launched it. Then Bomba took his place on the front of the platform and Gibo at the rear.

"Dip the paddle softly, Gibo," counseled the jungle boy, "so that we may not wake the caymans if there are any in this stream."

He himself set the example, gliding the paddle gently in the water and then bringing it back with a powerful sweep that had all the force of his shoulders behind it.

He studied the current, which ran strongly, and adapted himself to it as far as possible so that it would help rather than hinder the prog-

ress of his improvised craft. He did not have to battle against it, as he had no special point in view on the other side, and he moved across diagonally so that the sidewise push of the current should accelerate his movements.

The raft was clumsy, and their united efforts could not propel it at any great rate of speed. But it was moving in the right direction, and with this they were forced to be content.

They had covered more than half the journey when the water broke at a little distance to the right and a huge body emerged. Bomba saw it and his pulses quickened. His blood raced still faster when two more of those hideous, scaly forms appeared above the surface.

Alligators! Those dreaded pirates of Amazonian waters!

Gibo saw them, too, and gave an exclamation, for it was evident that the monsters had sighted the raft and were making toward it!

CHAPTER IX

A RACE FOR LIFE

"PUT all your power into your strokes, Gibo," commanded Bomba, as he himself paddled with desperate energy. "The shore is not far, and it may be that we will reach it in time."

Gibo needed no urging, and put his back into his work.

There were fully half a dozen of the saurians now in sight and all of them were converging toward the raft and its occupants. It was as though some underwater telegraph had notified the monsters that a feast was at hand.

Under the impulsion of two pairs of powerful arms the raft almost leaped through the water. But the alligators were coming now with the speed of an express train.

They reached the raft and circled about it like a hideous convoy, their great jaws agape, showing the terrible teeth with which they were lined, and their eyes fixed upon their intended prey.

There came a heavy bump under the raft. It was lifted half out of the water. The shock threw Bomba and Gibo to their knees, and only

their frenzied clutch on the logs prevented their being thrown into the stream.

The craft righted itself and its occupants staggered to their feet and once more resumed their frantic paddling.

An instant later there came a sharp snap and Gibo despairingly held up the stump of his paddle. It had been bitten cleanly in two. The remaining stump was worthless.

"Come here, Gibo, and take my paddle," ordered Bomba, "and throw me your spear."

Gibo obeyed, and Bomba, holding the heavy spear, went to the rear of the raft.

A monster alligator rushed toward him with jaws wide open, evidently intending to throw itself on the raft and capsize it with its weight.

With all the might of his powerful arms, Bomba drove the spear deep into the cayman's throat.

It was a mortal wound. With a hideous bellow, the brute wrenched itself loose from that terrible spear point, almost pulling Bomba from the logs as he stoutly maintained his grasp on the haft of the weapon.

The alligator thrashed about furiously in its death throes, lashing the water into foam and dyeing it with blood.

In a moment the other alligators were on it, tearing it to pieces.

"Paddle for your life, Gibo," commanded Bomba, as he held himself poised for his next assailant. "The spear has drunk blood and one of our enemies is gone."

They had some moments of respite while the alligators were feasting on their comrade. But Bomba knew that the respite was only temporary and that the other alligators would soon be again in full pursuit of the raft.

The shore now was much nearer, but with only one paddle at work their progress seemed pitifully slow.

And even if they reached it, their foes might catch them as they strove to climb the bank, which Bomba could now see was so steep as to be almost perpendicular, for the alligator is at home on land as well as in the water, and, despite its seeming clumsiness, can run with amazing speed.

Bomba's keen eyes took note of a great tree whose boughs extended far over the water.

"Steer for that tree, Gibo," he directed. "Bring the raft, if you can, beneath its boughs. Bomba has a plan."

The alligators finished their feast and again they pursued and overtook the raft.

But warned by the fate of their comrade, the cunning brutes refused to come within reach of that terrible spear. Instead, they resorted to

underwater tactics and tried again and again to upset the raft.

If it had been a canoe or a rowboat, they would have succeeded without difficulty. But the logs were heavy and the platform broad, and though at times the impact tossed it half out of the water, the raft was not overturned.

As they grew desperate, the savageness of their attacks increased, and Bomba knew that it was only a matter of time before he and Gibo would be thrown into the stream. And surely, they would be torn in pieces as soon as they touched the water.

He dropped the spear and took up his bow. The eye must be his target. Through that he could reach the brain. On any other part of those leather-like bodies the arrows would rebound as harmlessly as so many pebbles.

It was a pitifully small target to aim at from a tossing platform. But Bomba many a time had hit smaller ones.

Fitting an arrow to his string he selected the right eye of the biggest of the brutes and drew his bow.

The arrow struck the eye directly in the center, and the alligator was dead almost before the twang of the bowstring had died away.

Again its mates were upon it for their horrid feast.

The raft was now nearing the tree that was Bomba's goal, and the lad dropped the bow and picked up the spear, the haft of which he used as a paddle in an attempt to supplement his companion's efforts.

"Work, Gibo, till your armstrings break," shouted Bomba. "If we reach the tree before our enemies come again, we may live. Work for our lives!"

They labored madly at the paddle and the spear, and the raft glided forward. But before they could reach the overhanging boughs they were again surrounded by those gaping jaws and horrible eyes.

A terrible shock beneath threw the structure high in the air just as it was passing beneath a branch of the great tree. It came very close to overturning.

As it tossed about in a welter of foam, Bomba shouted:

"Do you see that bough, Gibo? Leap for it. Follow Bomba!"

The lad sprang high into the air and caught the bough. In an instant he had drawn himself up and wrapped his legs securely about it.

Gibo had sprung almost at the same moment. But his eyes were partly blinded by the perspiration that had been rolling down his face, and he missed it by a hairbreadth.

He fell back on the raft and was thrown to his hands and knees.

As he did so, a huge alligator hurled its body part way upon the raft. It snapped at Gibo's legs, but fell short by a matter of inches.

Then it drew itself up on the raft and lumbered toward the Indian.

CHAPTER X

IN THE TOILS

BOMBA saw Gibo's danger and acted with the quickness of lightning.

He wound his legs about the bough and threw himself into space, head downward, arms extended toward the raft.

With a clutch of steel, he grabbed Gibo's wrists and swung him off the raft just as the alligator's jaws snapped on empty air.

"Throw your legs about my body, Gibo!" shouted Bomba. "There, that is well. Now swing up your arms and clutch the bough. Good! Climb up on the bough and make room for Bomba."

Gibo obeyed, and Bomba, freed from his companion's weight, drew himself up and sat astride the bough.

They were safe!

"Said I not that there was none in the jungle like Bomba?" Gibo at last broke the silence. "He laughs at the beasts of the jungle and the caymans of the rivers. They cannot match their cunning or their strength with his."

"Bomba has not done much laughing at the

caymans," returned the youth. "But he can laugh now with a full heart. See how they swim about! See how they gnash their teeth as they glare at Bomba and Gibo! It is in my mind that they do not love us overmuch."

"It is well that they cannot climb trees like the puma and the jaguar, or they would tear us hence," replied Gibo. "They would rejoice if the bough should break and yield us to their jaws."

Bomba looked about him. The trunk of the tree was rooted close to the bank. Bomba saw a scaly form drag itself out of the water and take up its post at the foot of the tree.

"He is cunning, the cayman!" the lad exclaimed. "Look, Gibo, how he lies at the foot of the tree. He knows that Bomba and Gibo will not go down into the water, but that they must go down the tree unless they would starve."

"May the curse of the gods rest on him!" exclaimed Gibo fervently.

"The curse of Bomba's arrow may hurt him more," remarked Bomba skeptically. "Come, Gibo, let us climb up this bough until we reach the trunk of the tree. Then we will plan what it is best to do."

"Gibo is lost without his spear," remarked the native regretfully. "He cannot face the beasts of the jungle with empty hands."

Bomba's eyes scanned the waters beneath.

"I see the spear," he announced. "It is floating in the water, but the current is taking it to the shore. It will soon touch the land and Gibo will once more hold it in his hand."

"But the cayman!" objected Gibo. "He lies between Gibo and his spear."

"He will not lie there forever," replied Bomba. "Come, let us be moving."

They made their way along the branch until they reached the trunk. Here they ensconced themselves in a comfortable position in the forks of the tree.

The alligator marked their progress, and it seemed to Gibo that the eyes of the beast snapped wickedly as he saw them getting closer. Probably it thought that they would keep on down the tree and perhaps offer battle.

"It bellows viciously and begins to circle about the tree, eager for combat," announced the Indian, peering downward.

But, if so, its hopes waned when it saw the adventurers halt their progress and settle down in their chosen posts.

They were not coming down now. It must wait for its expected feast. Still, that was only deferred. Some time or other those beings trapped there in the tree would break for freedom. When they did, the alligator's time would come.

So it squatted down to wait, its unblinking eyes never losing sight of its prey.

"The cayman is patient," commented Bomba to Gibo. "Still, it will grow hungry and have to leave the tree in search of quicker food than Bomba and Gibo."

"Why does not Bomba's arrow leave the string and go to the brain of the cayman?" asked Gibo.

"Because Bomba has just two arrows left, and his arm is hindered by these boughs, so that he has no room to draw his bow to make sure of his aim. He cannot waste an arrow until he fashions more. Still, if it be that the cayman depart not soon, Bomba will take his chance."

For two hours and more Bomba and the Indian waited, hoping that their enemy would give up his vigil as hopeless. But that formed no part of the cayman's plans. It had its enemies treed. All it needed was patience.

"It were well not to waste the time," remarked Bomba at length. "What meat has Gibo in his pouch? Let us eat now so that we shall not have to halt later. Time is precious, and the heart of Bomba is sore that he has been so long on the trail to the maloca of Hondura."

Gibo produced the remnants of the tapir meat. It was not much, but it sufficed to appease, if it could not fully satisfy, their hunger.

The enforced rest that the alligator's siege gave

them was not wholly wasted, for it enabled them to gather reserves of strength that would stand them in good stead for the remainder of their journey.

But as the afternoon waned and their adversary showed no sign of quitting its post as sentry, they grew restless.

"It is too much!" cried Gibo at last, in exasperation. "Let Bomba fit an arrow to his string and send the cayman to the place of death."

"No, Gibo," answered Bomba, whose thoughts, as usual, had been busy during that enforced interval of rest. "Bomba has a plan that may save the arrow and thwart the cayman."

"What does the master have in mind?" asked Gibo.

"It is this," replied Bomba. "See you these trees, how they are interwoven? It were but little for one stout of heart and strong of arm to swing himself from tree to tree until he gets beyond the cayman's reach and vision. The monkeys do it for miles without setting foot to the ground. Bomba himself has done it many times, when the underbrush has been so thick that it was quicker to go through the trees than hack through the jungle. What says Gibo to Bomba's plan?"

"That it is good, master," replied Gibo enthusiastically. "Thus may we laugh and jeer at

the cayman who squats at the foot of the tree waiting for his food to drop into his mouth. He will go back and bury himself in the mud of the river bed in shame when he finds how foolish he was in thinking that he could catch Bomba. Let us go now before the skies begin to darken and the setting sun goes to sleep beyond yonder hills."

They rose to their feet and girded themselves for their perilous flight through the air.

For that it was perilous they knew full well. The least miscalculation in their leap from one tree to another, the breaking of a branch weaker than it seemed, and they would be dashed to earth and probably to death.

Still, all life in the jungle was a gamble with death, and they had become hardened to danger, and the alligator might sit at the foot of that tree for days. It was better to risk their necks now, when they were comparatively fresh and rested, than to wait until hunger had dizzied their heads and weakened their muscles.

At their stirring, the alligator lifted its head and watched them eagerly.

Bewilderment crept into the wicked eyes, however, when they saw the victims he was so sure of getting start to ascend the tree instead of descending it. And the bewilderment grew ludicrous when it saw these mysterious creatures leap

through the air from one tree to another, getting ever farther and farther away.

Bomba and Gibo had cleared perhaps a dozen trees without misadventure when, at Bomba's instance, they paused to rest.

Bomba peered down through the foliage and, with a chuckle, motioned to Gibo.

"Look, Gibo," he said. "The cayman has gone crazy."

It was a laughable spectacle upon which the Indian looked. The alligator was running around in circles, bellowing and swishing its tail in rage. It would stop at the foot of one tree and look upward. Seeing nothing there, it would run to another and repeat its action. As a cat that has lost the mouse it was playing with and cannot be comforted, so the gyrations of the alligator betrayed a discomfiture almost beyond description.

Gibo, grinning broadly, opened his lips to hurl a taunt at the brute, but Bomba quickly put his hand over the man's mouth.

"Be silent, foolish one," Bomba adjured him. "Is it not to escape his sight that we have fled through the tops of the trees? Why should we tell him where we are? He will soon be shamed and go back to the river where he can hide his head. But he will not tell his companions the trick that Bomba and Gibo have played on him.

Look thy fill upon him and laugh in thy throat, but make no sound that will betray us."

With intense satisfaction and stifled amusement the twain watched the discomfited brute, which finally tired of its unavailing search and waddled slowly and disconsolately back to the river. If ever there was a picture of sheepishness and mortification, the brute furnished it. No dog slinking away with its tail between its legs ever offered a spectacle of more utter dejection.

With an angry splash it plumped into the river and disappeared from sight.

Bomba chuckled, Gibo laughed aloud.

"The cayman will tell its children to beware of Bomba," gurgled Gibo. "Now can Gibo go back and find his spear."

"Not yet," said Bomba, laying a restraining hand upon the Indian's arm. "The cayman may be more cunning than we think and be lying in wait with its eyes just above the water. Let us wait a while before Gibo goes near the bank where his spear lies. It is better to be a little late than to go too soon."

For half an hour they waited, their eyes fixed on that part of the stream into which the alligator had plunged. Then, when they had become convinced that the brute was not lying in ambush, they slid down from the tree and by a circuitous

route and employing the utmost caution approached the shore.

There lay Gibo's spear, its point embedded in the mud while the handle swayed to and fro, moved by the impulsion of the eddies.

Having secured the spear, they went deep into the jungle until the fear of alligators had vanished. Then, as the night was coming on, they prepared to camp.

Gibo found some turtle eggs, and, in default of meat, they were not to be disdained. They made a fire and roasted them and then for the first time in many days ate their fill.

Reclining on the grass after they had finished their meal, they were congratulating themselves on their escape from the caymans when a slight rustling in the branches of the tree under which they lay attracted Bomba's attention.

He glanced upward, and what he saw froze his blood!

Crouched on a bough almost directly over their heads, his tawny body flattened close to its support, was a jaguar preparing to spring!

CHAPTER XI

THE JAGUAR SPRINGS

BOMBA was nearer to the jaguar than Gibo, and knew that he was being selected as the victim.

His bow and arrows were out of immediate reach, lying against the trunk of the tree. Gibo's spear was in the hands of its owner, who was sharpening the point against a rough stone near at hand.

The beast stared with its greenish-yellow eyes at Bomba. It was measuring the distance.

Bomba stared back without the slightest flicker of fear in his eyes. Into that stare he threw all the determination of his soul, the power of his will, the dominating quality of the man-thing before which the beasts of the forest, even those huge in bulk and ferocious in character, begin to feel uneasy—the unwinking stare that the lion-tamer bends on his charges.

For several seconds that silent duel persisted. The beast was evidently disconcerted by that steady stare. It moved slightly, shifted its position, but it did not spring.

"Gibo," murmured Bomba in a low tone his

lips scarcely seeming to move. "Listen to what Bomba speaks and do not move. Do not look up. Let your body be as the stone image that your tribal fathers worship. Does Gibo understand?"

"Yes, master," replied the Indian, sensing the deadly earnestness in Bomba's tone and knowing that some great danger threatened, "Gibo understands. Gibo obeys. Tell Gibo, if there be time, what he is to do."

Still that duel of eyes, the beast's and the jungle lad's!

"A jaguar is in the tree," murmured Bomba, as his hand stole so slowly to his belt that the motion was almost imperceptible. "He is preparing to spring on Bomba. Bomba is holding him with his eyes. Bomba's bow is out of reach. If he tries to get it, the beast will spring before Bomba can fit an arrow to the string. Bomba has only his knife at his hand."

Gibo's heart was stabbed with anguish, but he remained as rigid as a statue.

"The master cannot fight the jaguar with a knife," he murmured. "He will be torn to pieces."

Still that duel of the unwinking eyes!

"Listen, Gibo," went on Bomba in the same crooning monotone, "you have your spear at hand. When Bomba shouts, grasp the spear and bury

it in the jaguar's body if Bomba misses the throat."

"Gibo will be ready," promised the faithful Indian.

A moment of silence ensued as Bomba's fingers found not the handle of his knife but the blade.

The motion of drawing it from his belt broke the spell under which the jaguar had been held.

"Now!" yelled Bomba, as he sprang to his feet.

The jaguar leaped.

Through the air whizzed that gleaming knife and buried itself to the hilt in the jaguar's throat!

Like a flash, Bomba leaped aside and the great brute struck the spot where the lad had been an instant before and rolled over and over, tearing at the knife.

Gibo had leaped to his feet and grasped his spear, and now, with all the power of his sinewy arm, he drove it into the jaguar's body.

There was a horrible spitting and growling as the beast floundered about, its claws narrowly missing the legs of its antagonists. Then a convulsive shudder ran through the massive body and it straightened out and lay still. The man-things had conquered!

"Great is Bomba!" exclaimed Gibo in heartfelt wonder and admiration. "Who else than he could have thrown the knife so surely? When

Bomba said that he had but his knife Gibo trembled, for though Bomba might have killed the jaguar hand to hand, he would himself have died."

"It is nothing," replied the lad coolly, retrieving the machete from the beast's throat and wiping it on the grass before he returned it to its sheath. "What Bomba feared was not his aim but lest he could not hold the jaguar with his eyes until he could grasp the knife. Take out the spear, Gibo, for it may be that other jaguars are near, and it is well to be ready. You acted quickly, Gibo, and Bomba is pleased that he has so brave a helper at his side."

They built a great fire so as to keep any other prowling beasts at a distance. Thorn thickets near by offered a reasonably safe refuge for the night.

"The jaguar would have eaten Bomba and Gibo," remarked the jungle boy as he drew his knife. "Now Bomba and Gibo will eat the jaguar. Bomba will cut away the best parts and Gibo will roast them over the fire so that our pouches may be full when we start out at dawn."

The meat was tough and stringy, not as succulent as that of the tapir, but it would satisfy their hunger, and they were in no position to be particular, considering the utter absence of other supplies than turtle eggs.

In an hour or two they had enough prepared to meet their needs for several days to come, and before it should be exhausted Bomba hoped that he and his companion would have reached their goal—the maloca of Hondura.

That friendly village of the Araos was now his home, the only home he knew. He yearned for it and for the sight of the old familiar faces—the frail, lined face of Casson, that of the shrewd, kindly Hondura, that of little Pirah, the chieftain's daughter, even the wrinkled visage of Pipina the squaw, who had been so good to Casson. It would be good to see them all again.

Yet, for other things and other faces—faces that he had not even seen except in his dreams—he longed still more.

White faces, those of his own kind, those to whom his blood called, faces agleam with intelligence and spiritual qualities like those of the woman of the golden hair, Mrs. Parkhurst, like those of her son and husband. Above all, he longed to see two faces—the fine manly face that he visualized as that of the father he had never seen or if he had seen had been too young to remember, the mysterious Bartow, and that of the lovely woman whose picture he had first seen in the dwelling of Sobrinini, the face before which he had kneeled and wept as he divined that it was that of his mother. Would he ever see them?

Were the deepest longings of his nature always to be mocked and thwarted?

Musing in this way, not without bitterness, as he lay in his thorn thickets and looked up at the stars, he at last fell asleep.

He woke, as was his custom, when the first streak of morning began to climb the eastern sky. It was a delight to find himself breathing pure, sweet air, not the noisome, deadly odor that came from the dreaded colopichi trees.

He hoped that he had seen the last of them. Yet it might well be that he would encounter them once more in this region where they seemed to grow so thickly. This time, however, he would be on the watch and not let himself be entrapped in their gloomy shadows, as he had been before, until he could find no way of exit. At the first sign of their presence he would veer aside and seek some way round. Better to be months, if necessary, in reaching the village of Hondura than to leave his body to blacken like that of the peccary beneath the trees of death.

It was good, too, as they took up their march, to hear once more the myriad sounds of the jungle in place of the dead stillness there had been in the baleful region of the colopichi, to see the monkeys grimacing and chattering in the trees as they swung from branch to branch, to watch the humming birds as they flitted about like

streaks of light among the flowers, to hear the whir of the parrot's wings and their shrill screaming. They had come once more to a place of life!

The jungle here, too, was less tangled, and they were making good progress in the direction of the northeast when a sound came to Bomba's ears that halted him abruptly.

It was the distant beating of tom-toms and the shrill notes of a savage chant.

Head-hunters? The men perhaps of Tocarora, Bomba's deadly enemy? Or perhaps some unknown tribe just as ferocious?

"It is a war chant, master!" exclaimed Gibo. "They seek for blood."

"Quick, Gibo!" cried Bomba, pointing to the nearest tree.

They climbed it with celerity and hid themselves in the thick masses of foliage.

CHAPTER XII

SAVAGE FOEMEN

THE chant ceased, but the tom-toms still sounded their discordant and barbaric notes. There was triumph in them and also deadly menace.

"Does Gibo know what tribe dwells in this district?" whispered Bomba to the Indian, who sat upon a bough close to that on which he himself had taken refuge.

"A people with black hearts," answered Gibo. "Gibo has heard the old men of his tribe talk of them, and when they speak they make signs with their hands to ward off demons. They wash their hands in blood. They are worse even than the head-hunters of Nascanora that dwell near the Giant Cataract."

"Gibo speaks big words," ruminated Bomba. "How can they be worse than the evil men of Nascanora?"

"They are," repeated Gibo. "Nascanora's people cut off the heads of their captives and put them on their wigwams. But these spawn of the Evil One cook and eat the men they take in

battle. It were better far to die by the fangs of the snake or the teeth of the jaguar than to fall into their hands."

Cannibals! A prickly feeling ran down Bomba's spine. He had heard vaguely from time to time of tribes dwelling in the jungle who fed on human flesh, but he had never come in contact with any such and had been inclined to dismiss them as idle tales.

There was no time for further speech, for now the sound of tramping feet was close at hand. Bomba put his finger on his lips to impress upon Gibo the imperative need for silence and pushed the leaves that shielded him far enough apart to enable him to see without being seen.

A motley array of savages came in sight, marching in irregular order. At their head strode a gigantic and repulsive figure, who from his bearing and the cringing deference paid to him Bomba knew must be the chief.

An ivory pin was thrust through his nostrils, and from his pendulous lower lip hung an immense ring of brass. Bracelets of iron encircled his wrists. The upper part of his body was bare to the waist, and on the flesh rude pictures of men fighting had been daubed with yellow paint. His eyes glittered with ferocity. He was a fearsome figure, and Bomba, as his eyes took him in, felt instinctively for his knife.

The men who followed resembled their leader in dress and general appearance, though inferior in size and strength and less gorgeously adorned. They had the same cruel eyes, the same brutish features. Bomba had never seen such repulsive types.

But Bomba's eyes wandered from these to a small group of captives who hobbled along in the center of the troop, their hands bound so tightly that the cords sank into their flesh. There were half a dozen in all, while their captors numbered about twenty.

Whenever one of them lagged or stumbled he was pricked with spears or knives, and his gyrations under the pain brought loud shouts of laughter from their conquerors. They were evidently the spoils of some foray upon a peaceful village far away and now were being taken to the cannibals' settlement for what torture and death fiendish ingenuity could devise. Remembering what Gibo had said, Bomba's blood ran cold as he conjectured their fate.

The savages had evidently traveled far, as they were covered with dust and perspiration and their steps were weary.

A command came from the lips of the chief, and the men with evident relief threw down their weapons and bustled about, preparing their noonday meal.

Bomba wished with all his heart that they had chosen any other spot for a resting place. There was little probability of his being discovered, for the foliage behind which he hid was very thick, yet prying eyes looking upward might possibly discover something unusual and be prompted to investigate further.

If that evil chance happened, he and Gibo would join the miserable band of captives below, for against so many, though they might slay a few, they could not fight with any chance of ultimate success.

The meal was simple, consisting of strips of cured meat that the savages tore at like so many wolves. There was something queer about the look of that meat. Bomba wondered! But his thoughts sickened him, and he did not pursue them further.

Luckily, that sinister feast was not prolonged. The party was evidently in haste, and Bomba conjectured they had still a long way to go. The men resumed their arms, the captives, who had been given nothing to eat, were again placed in the center of the group, the tom-toms struck into a rhythmic beat, and the troop took up its march.

Only when the last footfall had died away in the jungle did Bomba and Gibo take a long

breath. They looked at each other soberly.

Frank dismay was in Gibo's eyes, deep meditation in Bomba's. Hitherto they had had ferocious beasts and reptiles to reckon with. Now they had to take into account still more ferocious creatures in the guise of men.

"They are men of evil," murmured Bomba. Bomba could see that, even without the words of Gibo. It were well that Bomba and Gibo should make haste to put distance between themselves and the men who eat the flesh of other men.

Gibo was emphatically of the same opinion, and after the most careful listening and reconnoitering to make sure that the men of evil had really gone, the travelers slid down from the tree and made all speed possible in the opposite direction.

The elation with which they had begun the day's journeying had vanished. In its place had come anxiety and foreboding. If they once fell into the hands of these demons, they saw themselves doomed to torture and anguish unutterable.

They did not pause even to eat, though they were ravenously hungry after their long morning's march. But time was precious, and every mile they put between them and their enemies was of untold worth.

They soon came to one of the rare open spaces

occasionally found in the jungle. It was a broad, rocky plateau, almost flat and destitute of earth, which explained why the jungle had not encroached upon it.

They had crossed perhaps half of the wide expanse before once more the weird beat of the tom-tom rent the air.

They immediately fell flat to the ground. There was no place to hide, and they hugged the earth, making themselves as inconspicuous as possible.

It was not the men they had first seen coming back. The riot of noise came from in front of them.

Bomba grasped the truth at once. The savages had been split into two parties. The first was the vanguard, hurrying on for some special reason. Now the rearguard was coming!

Even as the thought came to his mind a force of about thirty savages emerged from the jungle a few hundred yards away.

Bomba had cherished a wild hope that they might pass over the plateau at a distance and perhaps not detect him and his companion. But his heart sank as he saw that they were coming straight toward him.

Discovery was certain!

Wasting not a second, Bomba sprang to his feet.

"Let Gibo follow Bomba!" he shouted, and darted like a deer toward the jungle back of him. Once in its recesses there was a chance that they might be able to outguess or to outwit their pursuers.

A tumult of yells told them that they had been seen, and they redoubled their speed, while the savages followed in hot pursuit, shouting and brandishing their spears.

Suddenly those shouts of triumph were changed into yells of consternation.

The air was full of a great roaring and the monstrous bird of the sky came sweeping into view!

The savages broke and fled in mortal fright, desperately seeking cover in the jungle from which they had lately emerged.

Bomba and Gibo heard the roaring, and, looking up, saw the strange sky-dragon which was now swooping down toward the earth.

"Igmazil!" shrieked Gibo, and fell cowering to the ground.

Bomba felt a queer thrill run through him, but he stood upright, nor did he turn to flee.

As the great bird shot down, Bomba saw the faces of two men topped by curious helmets. Their eyes were studying the ground, and they paid no attention to the jungle boy.

Again came that tug at the roots of Bomba's

being—the drawing toward those of white blood. Why should he run from them? He would rather run toward them. Were they not his brothers?

"Stand up, Gibo!" he comanded, yanking the trembling native to his feet. "Be of stout heart. These men will not harm us. Have they not driven away the men that sought our blood?"

The airship touched the ground and ran along until it stopped a few yards away. Two men jumped from it and came toward Bomba.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN-BIRDS

THE men who had alighted from the airship were heavily bearded and bronzed, even as Bomba was bronzed. Had Bomba been more familiar than he was with national types he would have set them down as Spaniards, as indeed they were. Gillis and Dorn and the Parkhursts had had a lighter complexion than that of the newcomers.

Despite the strangers' swarthiness, Bomba knew at once that they were of white blood. The aquiline noses, the clear-cut features, the shape of the mouths and the expression in their eyes marked them as different and remote from the native inhabitants of the jungle.

One of them was tall and slender and had an air of authority that marked him as the leader of the twain. His companion was of stockier build and endowed with great physical strength.

There was no hostility, rather curiosity, in the looks the men bent on Bomba and Gibo, and as far as Bomba could see they had no weapons. There was, however, a heavy bulge at the hip

pocket of each that a more sophisticated person than Bomba would have rightly interpreted.

Gibo scarcely dared to look at these mysterious visitants from the sky, but Bomba, though his hand rested on his knife, faced them clear-eyed and without quailing.

The taller man addressed some words to Bomba that the boy could not understand.

"Bomba knows only English words," the lad stated simply.

"Ah, you spik Englees," the man rejoined, evidently delighted that he had found some means of communication, though his own knowledge of that tongue was very fragmentary and imperfect. "We are good men. We not hurt you. We wish to be friends."

"Bomba's heart is open," responded the lad. "He does not speak with a forked tongue. He would be friends with the men that come from the sky."

The man looked at him more closely. Then he turned to his companion and spoke to him in his native tongue.

"This is a queer thing, Ramon," he said. "This boy is white. Look at his features. Yet he is dressed in native fashion and wears a puma skin. And his companion is a native."

"The boy is a half-breed, perhaps, Carlos," answered the other. "Ask him."

"Are you white boy?" asked the man, who had been designated as Carlos.

"Yes," replied Bomba proudly. "Bomba is white. Look!" and he thrust aside the puma skin and revealed the dazzling whiteness of his chest. "Bomba lives in the jungle. He fights the beasts and snakes of the jungle. But Bomba is white."

The men looked at each other in bewilderment. This was something beyond their experience.

"The boy speaks truth," said Carlos to his companion. "His features are Caucasian. His skin is white. One can see from his face and his eyes that he fears nothing. A mere lad, but he fights with beasts and snakes!"

"And he knows the jungle," added his companion. "This may be a stroke of luck for us, Carlos. He may be useful to us. Ask him if he has seen or heard anything of Antonio."

Carlos turned to Bomba.

"We are airmen," he began.

"What is that?" asked Bomba.

"We fly in the sky," explained the man, with a covert glance of amusement at Ramon.

"How do you fly?" asked Bomba.

"It would take long to tell," replied Carlos. "Thees machine that you see here," and he pointed to the airplane, "eet go when ziz theeng turn," and he indicated the propeller. "We poosh the steeck and eet go down. We pull the steeck

and eet go up. But tell me zis. Have you seen a man, a white man like zis man here?" and he pointed to Ramon. "We lose heem out of the plane. We look for heem and we find heem not. We want to find heem. Have you seen heem?"

"No," replied Bomba. "It has been many moons since Bomba has seen a white man."

Carlos turned to Ramon.

"You see," he said, extending his hands in a gesture of negation and shrugging his shoulders disappointedly. "The boy knows nothing of Antonio. We would better be going."

"Yet the lad knows the jungle," replied Ramon. "He might prove invaluable to us in our search. Ask him if he will go along with us."

Carlos turned to make the query when suddenly there rose a chorus of yells and a number of arrows whizzed over their heads.

The natives, overcome at first by their superstitious fears, had seen that the mysterious birds of the air were men after all and they were rushing to the attack.

"Run for the trees, Gibo," cried Bomba.

Gibo, inured to obedience, set out at once at the top of his speed.

Bomba would have followed, but just then an arrow ridged his scalp and the blow deprived him of consciousness. He tottered and fell heavily to the ground.

"Quick, Ramon!" cried Carlos. "Jump into the cockpit while I start the motor going. But first let us throw the lad in. We cannot leave him to the mercy of these demons."

They grabbed Bomba and lifted him hastily into the airship. Carlos started the engine and then leaped into his seat. The motor roared, and the plane, after running along for a few hundred feet, left the ground and soared into the sunlit skies.

They were just in time, for a cloud of arrows followed the plane, some of them piercing the wings, but luckily doing no damage to any of the occupants of the airship.

While Carlos guided the plane, Ramon reached over and sent several shots from a revolver into the swarming crowd beneath. Two of the natives fell and the others scattered in confusion.

Then the plane mounted until it was out of the reach of missiles, and the airmen devoted all their attention to guiding it on its course.

"It will be a new experience for this lad when he wakes," said Ramon to his companion. "Wonder what he will think of it."

"Probably be panic-stricken and try to jump out," returned Carlos. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to bind him so that he won't do anything rash until we can explain things to him. Use some of that rope in the back of the fuselage."

Ramon followed his companion's advice. So when Bomba returned to consciousness a little while later he found himself trussed up and unable to use hands and feet without great difficulty.

He was a prisoner!

This was the conclusion to which he jumped. He did not know that the aviators had saved his life and that the very binding was done from kindly motives. All he knew was that he was being carried off in this fearsome contrivance without being consulted. He had been kidnaped. He was bound. Perhaps they were carrying him to some fearful death. He, who had hitherto been as free as the eagle, had had his wings clipped!

He had no idea of what had felled him. Perhaps one of these men had struck him on the head when he had not been looking. Perhaps this had been their object for some unknown reason from the very first. Possibly this had been why they had brought down this mysterious machine so close to him.

But these men had reckoned without their host. He would show them that Bomba's free spirit could not be cowed. They thought that he was helpless. Well, let them wait and see!

Apart from his bonds, the conveyance he was in filled him with dread. It was uncanny. They were mounting toward the skies. Were they car-

rying him to some unknown kingdom beyond the stars?

If so, he would never see his friends again, never see Casson or the Parkhursts or the father and mother in whose existence he still believed. It was terrible! It was intolerable! All his being rose in revolt.

With all the stealth and silence of which he was a master, he worked at his bonds until he had loosened them somewhat.

The men were engrossed with their instruments and, thinking he was still unconscious, paid no attention to him.

Now was his time. Noiselessly he drew himself up and peered over the side of the plane.

At the moment they were crossing a river and were flying low.

"Hold him, Ramon!" came in a startled cry from Carlos.

Ramon made a grab at Bomba.

Too late! For with one supreme effort Bomba had thrown himself over the side.

Down, down he went from that dizzy height, clove the water like an arrow and disappeared in its turbid depths!

CHAPTER XIV

IN MORTAL DANGER

BOMBA struck the water with a force that tore the breath from his lungs.

For a long time he seemed to sink; he did not know how long. Probably it was only a matter of seconds, but to him it seemed interminable. Dazed by the fall, his senses were numbed. He could scarcely think. Beneath the water he held his breath from force of habit.

It was the fresh air on his face that partially revived him. His long journey toward the bottom of the river was over. He had risen to the surface without any conscious exercise of his will.

He tried to strike out and realized that his hands were bound. He attempted to kick with his feet, only to find that his ankles were tied together.

"If Bomba does not get his hands and feet free, this river will be his grave," the lad muttered to himself.

Nevertheless, he managed to keep afloat by kicking out with his bound legs. This proving

tiresome, he turned over on his back and floated, while he worked hard to free himself from the cords that fastened his wrists together.

He worked desperately for two reasons. One was fear lest the bird-men should swoop down again from the skies and recapture him. The other was quite as deadly an apprehension. For all he knew, the river might be alive with caymans. What chance would he have in his present condition if they should come speeding toward him?

While he worked at his cords he wondered at his present immunity.

"They have not yet caught the scent of Bomba," he told himself. "But they will not leave him alone for long. Soon one will get the smell of fresh meat. Then another. And the retreat of Bomba will be cut off."

Bomba's skin was like silk, his muscles as sinewy as the withes of the trees. Cleverly as the knots had been tied, they were not proof against the strength and skill of the jungle boy.

The cords were almost off. One more vigorous twist and he would be free.

"Ah!" The exclamation was wrenched from Bomba's lips by something that came within his ken.

What he had dreaded had come to pass. Not far off what seemed to be a knotty log broke the

surface of the water. But it was not a log, as Bomba knew all too well.

He had freed his hands now and it was but the work of a few moments to get rid of the cords that bound his ankles. Yet in that brief space the "log" had come much nearer.

The jungle boy turned over and struck out strongly for the shore.

And now the "log" was instinct with life and was coming directly toward him. Nor was it the only one. Others were approaching with dismaying speed.

"Lucky it is that the shore is near, or the life of Bomba would end now and here," thought the boy.

But even the short space he had to cover promised to be too great for Bomba.

The shock of the plunge from the airship had left an odd dizziness in Bomba's head. His brain, usually so active and alert, functioned slowly. His wrists and ankles felt numb where the cords had bound them.

As in a baffling dream where one seems incapable of swift action, despite the best effort he can put forth, Bomba now seemed to himself barely able to move. He felt that he was crawling painfully through the water, his heart pounding against his ribs, his lungs aching, gasping with agonized strain.

This, however, was mental, not physical. As a matter of fact, he was cutting the water with meteoric speed, his arms and legs working like piston rods.

As the caymans were closing in upon him his bare knee struck the river bed. He rose to his feet and tore his way through the shallows to the dry ground.

The caymans quickly dragged their huge bodies to the beach.

Bomba ran staggeringly to the nearest tree and with the last expiring flicker of his strength swung himself up out of reach of the hideous jaws, one of which barely missed his foot.

He worked his way upward, while the alligators looked after him hungrily with their thwarted, glassy eyes.

At the back of the tree was a cliff that the top branches overshadowed. Bomba worked his way out on a bough that bent and crackled beneath his weight.

"The strength of the branch is Bomba's life," the lad thought. "Branch breaks, Bomba dies!"

But the branch held until the jungle boy was able to spring from it to the top of the cliff. Now he was safe, as far as the alligators were concerned. They could not climb the almost vertical cliff. He dismissed them from his mind.

Night had fallen with the suddenness peculiar

to the tropics. The boy had no food, and the claims of hunger made themselves felt. It was too dark to hunt for game. Still, he might find some turtle eggs when the moon should rise.

Suddenly he stiffened!

He had heard no real sound. Nothing stirred in the dark forest around him, nothing at least that ordinary eyes could see or ordinary ears could hear. But the sixth sense that had so often stood Bomba in stead carried to his brain a warning.

Silent as a shadow, he climbed the nearest tree.

His finely attuned nerves were conscious of presences that flitted from tree to tree and filled the night with menace.

"Men!" thought the lad to himself.

They might possibly be friendly. More likely they were hostile. He would take no chances. Motionless, he stood on a bough, flattened against the trunk as though he himself were a part of the tree, his trained eyes peering into the night.

He knew that he had not been mistaken. Human beings were in that patch of the jungle. But quite as certainly, after an hour had elapsed, he knew that they were there no longer.

Then only he relaxed. But he did not slide to the ground.

"Bomba will stay in the tree," he decided.

He found a crotch in which he could recline

in a partly sitting position, his arms and legs wound about convenient branches. To make himself still more secure he unloosed his belt and fastened himself so that he could not fall.

Bomba's rest was the rest of any other wild creature of the jungle; profound, yet so disciplined that any suspicious sound would fling him into full consciousness, mind alert, fingers on the handle of his machete.

At the first tinge of dawn he woke, ready for action. He was stiff from the long hours spent in the tree, bruised and sore by his fall from the airplane.

The first thing he thought of was food. He wanted meat, meat of the tapir or wild pig. Lacking these, he would satisfy his hunger with turtle eggs or fish, caught by hand in the waters of the jungle streams.

But keen as his craving was, caution was stronger. He climbed the tree until he reached the topmost branches. From that vantage point he obtained a good view of the jungle.

In the spreading light he could see nothing to rouse his suspicion. Though he stood there for a long time motionless, nothing stirred but the sleepy birds. No tenuous thread of smoke betrayed the possible campfire of an enemy.

Deep in the jungle he heard the howl of the jaguar, going back to his den after his night's

hunting. Nearer at hand something rustled stealthily in the bushes.

"A snake," thought Bomba. "Only a few things move. The jungle is still asleep."

Cautiously he slid down the trunk and made his way to the river into which he had plunged the day before. He washed his hands and face in the water, drank of the stream deeply, and then set out on his search for food.

It was the first time for many days that he had been wholly alone. His heart was sore for Gibo. What had become of the faithful Indian?

Bomba was warmly attached to Gibo, and if he had had the slightest knowledge of where to search for him would have set out at once to try to effect his rescue. But the trip in the plane had carried him he knew not where. He did not know whether Gibo was north, south, east or west of where he himself was at that moment. Moreover, that the Indian had been captured by the cannibals was all too probable.

Bomba was conscious that his thoughts were getting confused. A sweet, heavy scent was in his nostrils and his head was growing dizzy.

He looked up to see if the colopichi trees were near. Had he again come on that trail of terror? None of the baneful trees, however, was in sight. It was not their noxious influence that was stealing away his senses.

He looked about him. Around him on every side were odd, fantastically shaped, brilliantly hued flowers of a kind he had never seen before. From them exhaled a curious, overpowering scent. The odor was not unpleasant, quite the contrary, but it seemed to have an intoxicating quality. It was a strong stimulant. It had a curious effect upon his senses. It seemed to let loose a flood of emotions and to benumb his sense of prudence.

Bomba's head was in the clouds, his feet seemed to tread on air. He wanted to sing, to shout aloud. Several times he found himself on the verge of committing this folly, but a last remnant of caution clamped down upon his tongue.

"This surely is a place of enchantment," Bomba muttered to himself. He looked about him uneasily, fearful of something he did not understand, of an influence he could not combat. "The flowers grow so rank under foot that they are like a carpet for Bomba. And they have queer faces that look up at me. They would make a soft couch for Bomba, who has so often slept in a thorn thicket. And Bomba is growing weary."

He stood still, frowning, trying to shake off the drowsiness that was stealing over him.

"Why should Bomba be weary?" he asked himself confusedly. "For long hours Bomba has slept while the shadows lay heavy on the

jungle. Now the sun has waked and Bomba has also waked. There is no time for sleep now."

Still the strange drowsiness persisted. He staggered along like one who is drugged, barely able to keep his eyes open, fighting off an almost irresistible longing to surrender himself to slumber.

There seemed to be no end of that vast sea of brilliant flowers. Bomba turned to the right and to the left, but could not come to the end of them.

But he could go back, back to the tree where he had spent the night and where there had been none of these flowers that were robbing him of strength and resolution.

He turned and retraced his steps, a subconscious monitor warning him that he could not get back too soon.

He reached barren ground at last and his head began to clear.

Then something that was not a jaguar fell from a tree upon the lad's shoulders and bore him backward to the ground!

CHAPTER XV

CAPTURED BY CANNIBALS

BOMBA struggled fiercely. He saw hideous painted faces above him.

A club was lifted, gripped in a powerful hand. The club descended. A searing pain shot through Bomba's head. The painted faces disappeared in a red mist!

When Bomba awoke it was to a world filled with pain. His head throbbed. His body ached. What was worse, he was bound again. Tight thongs were about his wrists and ankles and beneath his knees.

As his brain gradually cleared he began to take note of his surroundings. He saw that he was in one of the huts of a native village. From the position in which he lay, half on his side and half on his back, he could see through the door a ring of rude huts, with the larger dwelling of the tribal chief in the center.

He could make out shadowy figures moving about; not shadowy in reality, but seeming so to him in the haze that enveloped his mind and senses.

The attempt to concentrate his gaze caused an intense throbbing in his injured head. With a sigh he closed his eyes.

A voice so faint that it was almost inaudible spoke from behind him.

"The master wakes?"

For a time Bomba lay without stirring, his muscles tense and rigid. Was his imagination playing him tricks? Surely, that had been the voice of Gibo. The whisper came again:

"If my master hears the voice of Gibo, let him speak."

Joy welled up in the heart of Bomba. Where he had thought to find only enemies he had found a friend. Gibo! His faithful follower! But how had Gibo got here?

Bomba tried to speak, but found that his tongue was thick. He could only mumble something almost unintelligible. He tried to roll over, but found that it was impossible, bound as he was.

There was a sibilant hiss from behind him, a warning from the ever watchful Gibo.

"Lie still, master. They come."

Bomba closed his eyes and lay motionless.

There was the sound of voices outside the rude shelter. Then from the sound of shuffling feet Bomba knew that several of his captors had entered.

One of them spoke sharply. There was a cry

of pain from Gibo as the vicious prick of a spear brought blood.

A quiver passed through Bomba. His muscles grew taut.

Though he did not open his eyes, he knew that some one had paused near him.

"He wakes," said a voice. "He has moved from where we put him. Ho!"

A prick of the spear sent a tingle of pain through Bomba's flesh, but he made no sign.

"He no wake," said another voice. "He sleep. Maybe take long sleep."

"No," reiterated the first voice. "He wake. See!"

A deep, searing jab of the spear brought an involuntary reaction from Bomba's muscles. He jumped, choking off the cry of pain that rose to his lips.

There was a cruel chuckle from his tormenter.

"He sleep, eh? You see."

Knowing that it was no longer possible to feign unconsciousness, Bomba opened his eyes and stared into the brutal face above his.

"Coward!" he gritted between his clenched teeth. "You make your spear bite into Bomba because he is bound. If he were free, you would not dare to face him. You would run as the rabbit runs to his burrow."

The savage faces remained unmoved by his

taunts. His captors stared back at him impassively. The one who held the spear raised his weapon suggestively, but the other stayed his hand.

"Chief say no," he declared.

The savages now seized Bomba roughly and sat him up with his back to one of the supports of the rude structure. The change in position caused twinges of pain in every part of his body. His head was a ball of agony.

One thing only was gained. He was now quite close to Gibo, who was similarly propped up against a pole. He could see him and talk with him.

Before leaving the hut, the man with the spear gave Bomba a wanton jab for the sheer delight in hurting, nor did Gibo escape a similar thrust. Bomba gritted his teeth and uttered no sound, a degree of stoicism to which Gibo was unequal.

"Master, they are demons!" cried Gibo.

Bomba needed no assurance on that score.

They were left alone in the hut. One of the savages took his stand near the door to guard the entrance. His back was toward those within. Evidently he thought that they were bound securely enough to discourage any attempt to escape.

For the first time, Bomba looked directly at

Gibo. He could see that the Indian had been harshly dealt with. His face and hands and legs were criss-crossed with cuts occasioned by his captors' weapons.

"Gibo was right when he said that these men are demons," said Bomba. "It was an evil day for Bomba and Gibo when they fell into such hands."

"Bomba and Gibo are the same as dead," replied Gibo mournfully.

"Bomba does not yet know how Gibo came into the power of these men," the lad said. "Let Gibo speak."

"When the great white bird swept down from the sky," said the Indian, shuddering at the recollection, "Gibo ran as the master told him. He thought Bomba was running with him. Then, when he looked back and saw Bomba taken up by the great white bird, Gibo was sure he would never see the master again."

He paused, and Bomba waited patiently for him to go on.

"Gibo follow bird on the ground," the native resumed. "Then it go too fast for the feet of Gibo. Gibo trip, fall, and when he get up again bird had gone away over the tops of the trees. Only the noise of its thunder could Gibo hear. Then the cannibals come, get Gibo, and bring him here."

It was now Bomba's turn to recite his amazing experience in the great bird that was like a hut on wings.

As the jungle boy talked, Gibo's eyes grew wide and his mouth dropped open.

"And yet Bomba lives!" he muttered, as though the fact were incredible.

"What is this tribe?" asked Bomba. "Is it the same people that Bomba and Gibo saw when they were hiding in the tree?"

"Yes," replied Gibo. "The chief is the big man with a pin in his nose and a ring on his lip. Gibo has heard his name. It is Gonibobo. He has the most evil heart of any man in the jungle. The squaws of my tribe frighten the children by saying that Gonibobo will catch and eat them if they are bad. Prisoners that are taken by him do not return. He has a big kettle and he boils men alive."

Bomba's eyes narrowed. He remembered now that he had heard Hondura speak of Gonibobo. His name was a synonym for all that was cruel and horrible.

And it was into the hands of that fiend that he and Gibo had fallen!

Bomba's bound hands clenched until the muscles rippled beneath the bronzed skin.

"We must escape, Gibo," he muttered.

"They are good words that Bomba speaks,"

Gibo replied. "But prisoners do not escape from Gonibobo."

Bomba frowned.

"Did we not escape from Japazy?" he asked. "And who could be worse than that son of evil?"

"Gonibobo is worse," replied Gibo. "There is no heart in his breast, only a stone. He will put us in a pot and boil us alive. And he will laugh and dance."

"We will escape, Gibo," Bomba reiterated.

"But how?"

"Bomba has not thought yet," replied the lad. "But he will think when his head has stopped burning. Be of stout heart. Fear not."

But despite his brave words he could not help feeling that there was far too much probability that Gibo's gloomy prediction would be fulfilled.

Still he had found himself before in many tight places, from which he had managed to escape. Experience had taught the jungle lad that while life lasted there was hope.

He tested his bonds. They held like iron and bit cruelly into his flesh. Then he straightened suddenly. The savage guard had whirled upon him. Two black piercing eyes stared into his.

CHAPTER XVI

FATTENED FOR THE FEAST

BOMBA, though startled by the sudden movement of the guard, stared back at him undauntedly.

For a moment their glances remained locked. Then with a grunt the guard again turned his back.

Bomba was puzzled. Had some slight sound he had made drawn the attention of his captor? At any rate, the incident had told him that the guard was not as indifferent as he had seemed. The pretended indifference was simply the stolid mask of the savage.

Bomba caught Gibo's eyes. They seemed to say:

"What did I tell you, master? These men are demons. They have eyes that can see through the backs of their heads."

As the morning hours dragged on to noonday, the heat became unbearable. The pain in Bomba's head increased. Flies and other jungle pests swarmed upon him, causing him unspeakable misery. He could not slap at them with his

bound hands. They feasted on him at will until he was a stinging agony from head to foot.

Gibo was even in worse case. His wounds had been many and were uncleansed. The insects tortured him. He groaned and writhed upon the ground, and Bomba was powerless to help him.

Their captors appeared to have forgotten them; all but the sentry who did not heed, probably gloated over their misery.

At last some one came. Bomba looked up to see a gigantic figure towering above him. He looked into the eyes of Gonibobo!

"Huh!" grunted the giant. He dug the toes of one foot into Bomba's ribs. "No good! Too thin!"

He turned and called out something that Bomba did not understand. Two of the younger bucks entered the hut. They stood rigid, with eyes on their chief, their faces expressionless.

Gonibobo gave them some curt orders, then turned and strode from the hut.

The bucks fell upon Bomba and Gibo. Their faces were of brutish ferocity. Bomba thought for a moment that his last hour had come.

But this time the prisoners were not to feel the points of the spears. To their surprise and mystification, the bonds about their wrists and under their knees were cut. The captives were lifted and carried carefully, almost gently, to two ham-

mocks in the open air. Into these they were comfortably placed.

Two men stood beside Bomba and Gibo while others went on some errand. Very soon two children of the tribe, not more than ten or twelve years old, came bearing vessels in which was a strange liquid.

It was the oil of the tampata weed, marvelously soothing and healing. With this the bodies of Bomba and Gibo were rubbed until a delicious drowsiness crept over them.

Bomba was mystified but not deceived by this unexpected treatment. As his bodily comfort increased, so did his suspicions. While seeming to notice nothing, he saw everything.

When the rubbing was over, food was brought to them. Bananas and cocoanuts, but no meat. Bomba longed for meat. The fruit seemed only to whet his appetite.

He noticed that Gibo ate nothing.

"Eat, Gibo," counseled Bomba. "You will need your strength."

But Gibo would not eat. He turned away from the ripe bananas, the milk-filled cocoanuts, as though they were loathsome to him.

Bomba divined the reason, but said no more. He himself ate ravenously. If he were to escape, his body would have to be fed and his mind active.

After the meal their hands were tied again, though this time the bonds were looser. Cords were again fastened beneath their knees. Then they were conveyed back to their prison.

Their attendants dispersed, and again only one sentry was left to guard the hut.

Now that his body was comforted by the healing oil of the tampata weed and the cravings of hunger were satisfied, Bomba felt an immense resurgence of energy. Gibo had said that it was impossible for them to escape from the clutches of Gonibobo. But the word impossible was not in Bomba's vocabulary.

Gibo was brooding. He turned to Bomba.

"Why did not the master refuse the banana and the cocoanut?" he asked in a tone of as much reproof as he ever permitted himself. "Gonibobo fattens us for the feast. He would give us no meat, for meat does not fatten. If we do not grow too fat, we may perhaps not be boiled for food."

"Does Gibo think that the same thought had not come into the mind of Bomba?" asked the lad. "Bomba knew why they fed us. Yet Bomba ate. Bomba will eat again when they feed us. It is foolish for Gibo not to eat, for he must be strong if he would escape from Gonibobo. And if Gibo turn away from food, the bucks of Gonibobo will make him eat by pricking him with

spears. Bomba says that it is wise for Gibo to eat. Even to-day, to-night, he may need his strength."

A faint flicker of hope came into the Indian's eyes.

"Has the master thought of something?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet," admitted Bomba. "But Bomba will."

Then silence fell between them for a time.

There was a stir in the camp outside, the sound of shouting and running feet. Several dark bodies flashed by the opening of the hut.

"They go to hunt or to fight, my master," Gibo commented. "The tribe of Gonibobo is always at war."

"That is well," said Bomba. "For those with whom they fight may conquer and free us from his hands."

Presently the din in the village lessened. The younger bucks among them had gone on their mission, doubtless one of bloodshed. Those that remained, with the exception of the guard at the door of the prison hut, dozed in the afternoon heat. This guard did not doze, but stood as motionless as a statue and apparently as little capable of fatigue.

The long afternoon wore on. Gibo found some relief from his despair in drowsing.

But Bomba did not drowse. His active mind was busy in thoughts of escape. Scores of plans and expedients followed each other through his brain, were weighed, dissected and finally dismissed. He had not yet found the key to the enigma. Yet never for a second did he allow himself to despair.

Toward dusk a party of the bucks returned. They brought with them a prisoner, a white man, who glared at them fiercely and poured on them a torrent of invective that they could not understand.

They understood his gestures and his looks, however, and a yell of pain from the prisoner testified to the manner of his punishment.

There was a commotion at the door of the hut in which Bomba and Gibo were imprisoned. The man was flung into the room and fell sprawling upon the mud floor.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WHITE STRANGER

THE man who had been so unceremoniously thrust into the hut scrambled to his feet. He nursed his right hand in his left, and from his right sleeve came a tiny trickle of blood.

Bomba regarded the newcomer with a lively curiosity. Gibo glanced at him apathetically and turned his gaze away. Little mattered to him, save that which immediately concerned himself and his master.

The stranger raged furiously in a foreign tongue for a few moments. Then he looked up, saw Bomba and Gibo and realized for the first time that he was not alone.

He was a thick-set, muscular fellow with a shock of black hair thrown back from a pale face. His eyes were dark and expressive. His mouth was well shaped and the jutting jaw showed determination.

The face of a brave man, Bomba thought, but a ruthless one, a man who would stop at nothing to achieve his personal ends.

At least, he was white! And that meant much to Bomba.

The stranger stared at Bomba and Gibo and then again at Bomba.

"Well, it seems that I've got company in this hole," he said, flinging out his hands recklessly and using the Spanish tongue. "What are you," he stared in frank curiosity at Bomba, "colored or white?"

The lad shook his head in token that he did not understand.

"Bomba speaks English words," he said.

"I see," replied the newcomer. "Well, it's lucky that I do, too."

He repeated his question in English, which he spoke much better than had the two aviators.

"Bomba is white," the lad replied to the query.

"I thought so, though your skin is almost as dark as a native's. And as for your dress—or the lack of it—"

"Bomba lives in the jungle," the boy replied, not without dignity. "In the jungle there is little need for clothes."

Again the man stared at the jungle boy for a long moment. It was evident that Bomba interested him. A twinge in the wound that still dripped blood caused a grimace. The man muttered an imprecation on his captors and nodded his head toward Gibo.

"Who's that?" he asked Bomba.

"He is an Indian. His name is Gibo," explained Bomba. "He is my friend," he added simply.

The white man nodded.

"I imagine in this hole a man could do with a few friends," he remarked.

His eyes wandered restlessly about the bare hut. There was a satirical gleam in them as they returned once more to the face of the jungle boy.

"Not much in the way of comfort," he said. "Been here long?"

Bomba told him, and the stranger continued to question him, drawing him out skillfully. To his surprise, Bomba found himself talking easily to the white man. He spoke of the great bird, of its capture of him and of his subsequent escape.

The stranger listened, his keen, restless eyes intent upon Bomba's face.

"Those men in the big white bird," he prompted, when Bomba paused. "Can you describe them?"

"I do not know," said Bomba slowly. "They had strange bulging things for eyes—"

"Goggles," interjected his listener.

"And they had clothes all over them," went on Bomba, "even their heads."

"What about their size?" came the question. "Were they tall or short?"

"One was tall," replied Bomba. "The other was shorter, thick like you. And they called each other Carlos and Ramon."

The stranger slapped his knee with his hand.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Now I know that the plane is still flying over the jungle. They are looking for me."

At that moment there was a roaring in the sky and a monstrous shadow swept over the sun-baked ground outside the door.

The Spaniard jumped to his feet. Into his face flashed a sudden white flame of hope. He ran to the door and looked upward. He cried aloud some words in his native tongue.

"Carlos! Ramon! I am here!" he shouted, although he knew that he could not be heard by the men in the plane.

He would have rushed past the sentry. But the fellow turned about and the prisoner felt the sharp prick of a spear point in his chest.

"Beast!" cried the Spaniard. "Let me pass!"

He was pushed back, back relentlessly into the hut and forced to his knees. At a call from the guard two other men entered and bound the struggling prisoner as Bomba and Gibo were bound.

For some time the white man raved, while the hum of the airplane grew fainter and fainter in

the distance until finally it died away. Then there was silence in the prison hut, a silence eloquent of gloom and despair.

Gibo, to whom the roar of the great "bird" had brought back his old-time terror, cowered in his corner.

At last Bomba spoke. He raised himself on his elbow and stared hard at his new fellow prisoner.

"You say the men with the great white bird look for you?" he queried.

The stranger nodded moodily.

"There are not many 'great white birds' in the neighborhood, I imagine," he said, with a flash of startlingly large white teeth. "The plane is probably the one belonging to my comrades. And when they came down to earth and took you up in it they were no doubt looking for me."

"How did the white man get lost?" asked Bomba.

"We were on an exploring trip over South America. I crawled out to repair a wire one day and fell overboard," the white man explained. "Lucky it was that we were flying over a body of water at the time. I was shaken up a good deal and badly bruised, but I managed to get to shore. I must have been confused in my mind, for instead of waiting for my comrades to come back I wandered off into the jungle."

"You have ridden on the great white bird," said Bomba, regarding him curiously. "You have no fear of it?"

The white man laughed. It was not a mirthful laugh.

"Afraid?" he exclaimed. "You say afraid? They are my friends who are in the plane. Why should I be afraid?"

Bomba was bewildered.

"But the big white bird itself," he cried. "It carries one up to the stars. It is a fearful monster."

"It is no monster," corrected the stranger wearily. "It is but the slave of the white man, in which he rides the heavens."

"But it has wings like a thing that lives," persisted Bomba.

"Made by men," explained the stranger.

"And a voice," went on Bomba.

"Also the device of men." The voice of the stranger grew sad. "My friends, Carlos and Ramon look for me. Just now they passed almost over my head and did not know I was here. Rescue so close and yet to pass by—it is maddening!"

"Your friends may know that you are here," consoled Bomba. "They may have seen you captured in the woods. If they come once perhaps they come again. Who knows?"

The new prisoner raised his haggard face and looked at Bomba.

"There are but two of them," he said. "Even if they should find me, what chance would they have against this band of savages? They would only lose their own lives and could do me no good."

Bomba was silent for a few moments, thinking this over. Then he said:

"The natives would fear the great white bird. They would think it was an evil spirit, a demon come to slay them."

The Spaniard dwelt upon this thought and a flicker of hope came into his eyes.

"You think that fear would keep them in check and give us a chance to escape?" he said. "It is possible. Still, they may not even know that I am here. They cannot see through the roof of this hut."

There seemed no answer to this, and again there was a long silence.

"If we could but get out of this hut—" began Bomba.

The Spaniard sat up with a fierce gesture that startled the jungle boy.

"Ah, yes!" he exclaimed. "If we could but escape from this hut, if only for a short time, all might be well. I could build a fire, a signal fire, and bring my friends to me."

He lapsed into silence again, an angry, nervous silence, his eyes on the hard dirt floor of the prison.

"One of us may escape," said Bomba softly. "Perhaps not all. If Bomba were that one and he knew the white man's name, so that the men who fly would know that Bomba was telling the truth, he might find the stranger's friends and warn them."

"My name is Spiro," replied the Spaniard. "Antonio Spiro. But you have as much chance to escape, my young white boy, as the deer when the jaguar has fastened on his throat."

The guard came inside the hut, followed by two young bucks of the tribe. The guard pointed to Spiro.

"Him!" he grunted. "Gonibobo say bring him!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A DASH FOR FREEDOM

Antonio Spiro was jerked to his feet and the bonds about his ankles untied. Then he was hurried out between the two bucks.

Alone in the hut with Bomba, Gibo shivered.

"They will boil him," he moaned. "We shall be next, my master."

"Courage, Gibo," replied Bomba. "All will yet be well."

Soon after the disappearance of Spiro, footsteps were heard approaching the hut.

"They come for us, master," whispered Gibo.

Like a snake, Bomba hitched over the space that separated him from the Indian.

"Listen!" he commanded. "If they take us before the chief, they will free our feet as they did the feet of the white man. That will be our chance, Gibo. If they take their eyes from us but for a moment, we may escape. Watch Bomba, and do as he does."

He had time for no more. Savage men entered the hut, released their feet, and, grasping them roughly by the arms, brought them into the presence of the chief.

Gonibobo sat upon a "throne" built of caked mud and rushes. There was a rude canopy of leaves over his head. In a semicircle about him stood his warriors, a savage, brutish lot, armed with bows and clubs and spears.

The women and children of the tribe had gathered in the background and regarded the prisoners with eager interest. Bomba wondered if there were any in the entire group who would be glad if he escaped, and decided that there was not one. For the women looked as cruel as the men, and even the little children stared gloatingly upon the prisoners.

However, his feet were free, and Bomba knew that there was no one among that tribe of cannibals as fleet of foot as he, should he be able to win through the ring of death about the village.

He looked straight before him and pretended to notice nothing. Yet he saw everything.

Antonio Spiro stood not six feet from him. His face looked more pallid than ever here in the weird jungle twilight. His eyes were flashing angrily, and every once in a while he tried to shake himself loose from the grip of his captors.

"He is foolish to struggle," thought the lad. "He uses up his strength, strength that he may need."

Meanwhile, Gonibobo motioned Bomba to come nearer. The jungle boy walked toward

him with firm step, his eyes never falling before those of the fierce cannibal chief.

Gonibobo felt of the boy's arms, thrust a big finger between the ribs. Bomba's blood boiled at the indignity, but he did not betray his emotion by as much as a twitching muscle.

"Not bad," grunted Gonibobo. "Three days more—make good stew. We have feast. Take him away," he ordered.

Gibo trembled so much when he stood before the chief that Gonibobo turned from him contemptuously.

"Him no good," he growled. "Dark skin make stew for women. White skins make stew for braves."

He made a gesture of dismissal, and the captives were herded together, preparatory to being taken back to their prison.

Three days, thought Bomba. Three days more of life and then a hideous death at the hands of this cannibal tribe!

But his feet were free. They would not be free again. He must act now or not at all.

Swiftly, he plucked the knife from the belt of the nearest savage. Then he dived suddenly through the legs of another savage, upsetting him. This one, in falling, grabbed at his companion, and the two went down together.

The savage who held Gibo felt a fierce tug at

his ankle. With a grunt of alarm he released his grip and Gibo was free.

So swiftly had it all happened that the savages were taken completely by surprise. They grappled confusedly with each other, while Bomba and Gibo were off with the speed of light.

The men guarding Spiro darted after the fugitives, leaving the prisoner unheld.

The Spaniard did not lose a second. Head lowered, he darted among the trees and disappeared.

"Come, Gibo!" cried Bomba, as they vanished into the shadows. "Gibo's legs must save him now." But poor Gibo was not as fleet of foot as Bomba and had hard work keeping near him.

A host were now in pursuit of the fugitives. The war cry of the savages rang through the jungle, filling it with hideous noise.

Gibo gave a cry as he tripped over a root and measured his length on the ground. Bomba turned at the cry and ran back.

"Gibo has hurt his foot," groaned the Indian, as Bomba assisted him to his feet. "He cannot keep up with Bomba. Let Bomba go. Gibo will remain."

"Where Gibo cannot go Bomba will not go," replied the lad simply.

Gibo's eyes showed adoration, but he still gasped a protest.

"It is death, master. It is better that one die than two. Gibo cannot run fast. Listen! They are near us now."

Bomba's only answer was to begin to run, dragging and half-carrying the Indian with him.

"We may yet escape," he panted. "Come!"

As they ran, their feet suddenly lost the solid ground. They felt themselves slipping into space.

The Indian was torn from Bomba's grasp and disappeared. Bomba's outflung hands caught the root of a tree and clung to it with desperation.

Bound as his hands were, he still managed to pull himself up until he felt his feet again upon the ground.

He looked about him like a wild beast at bay. Now he knew himself in a trap.

Before him was the cliff over which poor Gibo had fallen. Behind and about him on either side was a semicircle of savages. His ears told him this, for the cries now rose from all sides. He was in the center of a ring of death.

He had been carrying in his teeth the machete he had torn from the belt of his guard. He gripped the handle more securely in his strong jaws and sawed away at the thongs that bound his wrists.

One gave way and then the other. An exclamation of relief burst from him. His hands were

free, and in one of them he held his weapon. Let them come on!

There was a sound in the underbrush near him. Bomba whirled about as the figure of a man broke through the bushes.

It was Spiro, breathless, panting, his black hair straggling across his face. In his bound hands he held a stout, heavy stick which was his one weapon.

"Spiro!" cried Bomba. "Quick! Let Bomba cut Spiro's bonds!"

His machete quickly severed the cords about the Spaniard's wrists.

"They are all about us," gasped Spiro. "Yours was a brave attempt, boy. But there is no chance for us."

"We can fight," replied Bomba grimly. "Look out." A spear thrown from the shelter of a tree whizzed past Spiro, missed him by the narrowest margin and lodged in the trunk of a tree close to Bomba.

"Come," said the lad.

He drew Spiro behind the rock that had hidden the edge of the precipice from him and Gibo.

The savages closed in upon them now with shrill shouts. From all sides they swarmed, armed with clubs and spears.

Again and again Bomba struck at his nearest foes. His knife bit deep, as was evidenced by

the growing number that howled and writhed upon the ground.

Spiro too, fought like a madman. He dodged deadly thrusts with an almost uncanny skill and laid about him with his club as a flail that did heavy execution.

But this could not go on forever, and Bomba and Spiro knew they must soon be overpowered by sheer force of numbers.

And at last the end came.

Spiro raised his club to strike, but dropped it with a groan. A spear had caught him in the shoulder and sent him staggering backward. Bomba caught him just in time to keep him from slipping over the precipice.

The action proved his own undoing. Three savages hurled themselves upon him, pinning him to the ground!

CHAPTER XIX

A TEST OF NERVE

EVEN against such odds, Bomba fought like a wildcat. He twisted his machete until it stabbed the enemy nearest him. The man cried out and let go. But others fell upon the lad and tore the knife from his hands.

As Spiro had said, it was a brave attempt, but it had failed. Bomba for a moment almost envied the fate of Gibo. The latter had at least escaped the cannibal's hands, while he himself was doomed in three days to make a feast for Gonibobo.

His captors drew his hands in front of him to bind him. The hand of one of them felt the little book beneath the puma skin and drew it forth.

Bomba grasped at it desperately.

"No! No!" he cried. "Do what you will with Bomba, but leave him this. See, it is but bits of paper."

But the savage had already wrenched away a small sheaf of the pages.

Bomba uttered a cry of dismay and closed his

hand upon the remaining part of the book with the energy of despair.

"See! They are bits of paper," he repeated. "They are worthless to the men of Gonibobo."

With the wondering face of a child, the savage looked at the pages of scribbled paper. Then, with a grunt of disgust, he crumpled them and threw them among the bushes. But the precious remnant Bomba still retained, and he hastily thrust it back beneath the puma skin, still attached to the cord that held it.

"Come," grunted the savage. "We go to Gonibobo."

In Bomba's heart was something akin to despair. Part of his precious book had been torn from him. Might it not have been the most important part? Would he ever know now the secret of his parentage?

A sharp prick of a spear at his back sent him stumbling forward.

The prisoners were brought before Gonibobo. The face of the cannibal chief was like a thundercloud.

"You runaway prisoner," he said to Bomba. "You must be taught to fear the great chief, Gonibobo."

Bomba drew himself up.

"I do not fear you, Gonibobo," he said boldly. "Bomba of the jungle fears no man."

The savages standing about looked at him as though he were mad. The face of the chief grew blacker in its wrath.

"You no fear Gonibobo? He will teach you to fear."

Bomba did not alter his expression by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. Red wrath was flaming in him. Because of Gonibobo Gibo had lost his life. Because of Gonibobo the secret of his parentage might be forever lost to him.

"Gonibobo can no more than kill Bomba," he retorted. "Bomba is not afraid to die."

The chief frowned. His face was a mask of ferocity fearful to behold.

"Gonibobo will make the jungle boy eat his words," he declared.

A clap of his hands made several bucks jump to do his bidding. The chief gave a brief command. A fire was lighted and the point of a spear thrust into it.

Antonio Spiro, standing close to Bomba, said:

"They are going to burn you, boy. Do not defy them."

"They have killed my friend," said Bomba. "I have no fear of them. Bomba is no stranger to pain. Let them do to me what they will."

On the face of Spiro were beads of sweat.

"No!" he cried. "I cannot stand here and see it. Don't be a fool, boy. These savages are

devils. They will make you pay for your defiance."

Bomba maintained a stoical silence.

Gonibobo glared at him. The jungle boy sent back a steady stare that did not waver.

The spear point was ready. It was drawn from the fire, glowing red. The Spaniard groaned. He started forward.

"He is only a boy," he shouted. "Fiends! Demons! Let him go!"

The savages thrust him roughly back. He was held, raving impotently, forced to look on at this fiendish play.

At the command of the chief, the spearhead was brought close to the breast of Bomba. He could feel the breath of it upon his skin, scorching it, but made no sign.

Slowly Gonibobo spoke, the words falling like strokes of doom.

"Gonibobo is chief here. He kills or he keeps alive. No one dare say 'no' to Gonibobo. Jungle boy say 'Gonibobo good chief' and the spearhead shall come no closer to his breast. Jungle boy no say, 'Gonibobo good chief' and spear bring forth his heart. Speak, jungle boy."

There was dead silence in that place while all eyes turned upon the sturdy lad, standing straight and defiant in the midst of his enemies.

Spiro groaned aloud.

"Say what he tells you," he whispered to Bomba. "It is madness to do otherwise."

Bomba braced himself, called upon his reserves of strength and courage and said slowly, each word sounding clearly in that thick, heavy silence:

"Gonibobo is a demon. He has an evil heart. He tortures Bomba because he is bound. Any woman of his tribe could do as much. If Gonibobo is not a coward, let him loose Bomba's hands and dare to stand up before him. Bomba will fight Gonibobo with knife or spear or club. Bomba has spoken."

There was a gasp from the amazed audience. Then the savage who held the spear came to life. The next moment the weapon would have been plunged deep into Bomba's heart.

A cry from the chief halted the hand of the brave.

"Wait!" cried Gonibobo.

Bomba had steeled himself for a moment of frightful agony. Now, at the command from Gonibobo, he looked bewildered, dazed. The cruel chief had spared him. Why?

Gonibobo was speaking. He was a towering and terrible figure as he stood there with hand outstretched.

"For long time Gonibobo has searched for a brave man," the chief said. "Gonibobo never

found one before who dared look straight in Gonibobo's eyes. This jungle boy," he pointed to Bomba, "he brave. He very brave. He tremble not before the redhot spear and he dare defy Gonibobo to his face."

There fell a deep silence. Bomba waited, tense and rigid.

"Because he has a brave heart," continued the chief, "Gonibobo will take that heart from his breast and roast and eat it. Then will the courage and strength of Gonibobo be doubled. The jungle boy's heart will give Gonibobo longer life. It will give him power over all the tribes. But before Gonibobo eat the heart he will make sacrifices to the gods. It is not meet that this thing be done in haste. Three suns must pass. Then will there be a great feast, and the heart of the jungle boy will be eaten by Gonibobo."

The hand of the chief fell to his side. Bomba had heard his doom.

"Take away," the chief commanded, pointing to the prisoners. "If they escape again, Gonibobo, with his own hand, will kill the braves that guard them."

The captives were bound together and hobbled so that they could scarcely walk. Their guards were taking no chances this time. Two of the strongest bucks stood on either side of them, spears fixed, so at the slightest suspicious

motion the weapons could be thrust through the breasts of the prisoners.

Once more in the little hut, Bomba and Spiro gave themselves up to gloomy reflections.

"Well," said Spiro at length, rolling over so that he could see the jungle lad, "things look black for us, my young white boy. Three days more of life we have and then—what?"

Bomba shrugged.

"Who can tell what comes after death?" he replied. "We shall see."

The Spaniard gave a harsh little chuckle.

"You take things with philosophy, my young friend. As for me, I cannot be so calm. I still keep beating against the bars of my cage, trying to think of some way of escape."

"Many things may come to pass in three days," replied Bomba. "They have bound Bomba's hands and legs, but they cannot bind the mind of Bomba. Bomba will try to think what may be done."

"That Indian who was with us," suggested Spiro. "They did not recapture him. May it not be that he will be able to bring us aid?"

Bomba shook his head sadly.

"If he were alive, he would go through fire to get help for Bomba," he replied. "But he is dead."

"How do you know that?" asked Spiro.

Bomba gave the details of the chase through the jungle and the fall of Gibo over the precipice.

Spiro frowned.

"It is bad," he commented. "Still, he is fortunate to have died so quick and easy a death. He is luckier than we. Then our one hope left is that my friends in the airplane may learn of our plight and come to our help. They still look for me. But if they do not come in three days, we are dead men."

"It will be a bad death to die," said Bomba simply. "It is not pleasant to think that Gonibobo will eat the heart of Bomba."

The Spaniard shuddered.

"I don't wonder at the superstition of the fellow," he remarked, "for if there was ever a brave heart, it is yours. Jove, how you defied him! He was thunderstruck. No wonder his men thought you must be mad. I didn't think there was any one in the world that had such courage."

"It was nothing," disclaimed Bomba. "Gonibobo is but a man, and Bomba fears no man. If he had freed my hands and faced me, Bomba would have shamed him before the men of his tribe."

"I believe you would," declared Spiro admiringly, "and I think the rascal knew it. I'd hate to have you as an enemy, young white boy."

"Bomba wants Spiro as a friend," replied

Bomba. "Spiro fought well against the savages. He has a strong heart."

There fell a long silence between the two. They had little in common, this product of civilization and the boy who had been brought up in the jungle, little except the fact that they were doomed to die together. But they were both white. And they were both brave. And this created a tie, made still stronger by their mutual danger.

In the silence a thought came to Bomba. Should he show to Spiro the mutilated book he had wrested from the hands of Japazy?

Here was a man who had come from the great wise world outside the confines of the jungle. The man must know a great deal that was denied to Bomba. He would know what the strange words meant, perhaps. He might be able to find from the book something about Laura and Bartow!

The boy's heart beat fast. Was this the moment when he was to learn the secret of his parentage?

With his bound hands he fumbled for the precious book. But he was in an awkward position and found it difficult to reach it. He was so long about it that Spiro noticed his efforts and offered to help.

"It is here," returned Bomba, indicating the under part of the puma skin.

Spiro drew the notebook forth and regarded it with interest.

"You want me to read it, yes?" the Spaniard asked. His black brows were twin arches of interrogation.

"Yes," replied the lad. "Bomba cannot read what is inside. Bomba must know what the words say."

There was a desperate eagerness in his tone that caused the Spaniard to regard him closely.

"Your hands are trembling," he commented. "Yet you did not tremble when you looked into the eyes of Gonibobo and dared his wrath."

"There is in that writing," said Bomba, "that which means more to Bomba than life or death. It may tell me of my mother."

A change came over the face of the Spaniard. It became curiously gentle.

"I will read," he said.

CHAPTER XX

BOUND AND HELPLESS

BOMBA leaned forward intently with all his soul in his eyes. Was he at last on the brink of a great discovery?

A torch had been attached to a post in the hut so that the guard might keep the prisoners constantly in sight. The light was flickering and poor. Spiro shifted his position so that the torchlight might fall upon its pages.

He frowned, knitted his brows and studied the scrawled leaves, while Bomba waited, scarcely daring to hope.

At last Antonio Spiro shook his head. Regretfully, he handed the book back to Bomba.

"It is writing!" exclaimed the lad. "Is it that Antonio Spiro cannot read?"

"Spanish I can read and English," replied Spiro. "But the writing on these pages is neither of these."

Bomba did not understand. He thought that white men knew everything. He shook his head despairingly. Tears of bitter disappointment welled to his eyes.

"Bomba thought he would know at last," he murmured. "Perhaps Bomba is never to know."

Spiro studied his companion curiously. He had grown to like and admire him immensely, and he sincerely sympathized with him in the downfall of his hopes.

"The writing is in a strange tongue," he explained. "It is Greek, perhaps. Then again, it may be Hebrew. I cannot tell. I wish I could."

Bomba took the mutilated book and not without difficulty restored it to its place. The words of Spiro left his mind bewildered, groping. The words "Greek" and "Hebrew" conveyed to him no meaning.

"The marks on the pages are writing?" he asked.

"Assuredly," replied Spiro, "but in a tongue that I cannot read."

"Then if they are writing," Bomba proceeded laboriously, "it may be that somewhere there is a man that can read them?"

"Yes," said Spiro. His heart was touched by the lad's ingenuousness. "A learned man, a student, a professor of languages, might read the writing. But Spiro is none of these. He knows how to fly but little else. He does not even know enough," he added bitterly, "to keep out of the hands of the cannibals."

Bomba sighed. Always, he thought, there was

delay. Knowledge was held out before him only to be snatched away when he reached out eager hands for it. When was he to know? Would he ever know?

"If Gonibobo has his way," thought the lad, "Bomba will die in three days. And he will die knowing nothing of his father and mother."

Morning came and another day—another night and another day.

Outside their miserable prison in the native village there was horrible activity. The braves of Gonibobo were preparing for their great feast day.

The huge iron pot that served for human sacrifices was brought forth. Bomba and Spiro could see it from where they lay, fettered and powerless to prevent their hideous fate.

Beneath the pot, which was slung from a tripod of stout sticks, great bunches of brushwood were piled. Back a little farther where the trees of the jungle encroached upon the village, another vast pile of fuel grew ever higher.

"It will take much fire to boil us done," said Bomba grimly.

Spiro shuddered. The face of the Spaniard had grown pinched and haggard. Despite the quantities of milk and bananas and other fattening fruits that had been forced on the captives, the white man had lost pounds of flesh. His

clothes, torn and tattered, hung loosely upon his frame. His face was flushed, his eyes unnaturally bright.

"The fever works in his veins," thought Bomba, gazing gloomily upon him. "Perhaps he may yet cheat the vengeance of Gonibobo."

"Fiends! Demons!" raged the white man. He ground his teeth and tugged fruitlessly at the bonds that held his hands. "This is the end of Antonio Spiro, that he may make food for savages!"

"Your wrists are like raw meat," said Bomba. "You but hurt yourself by trying to get free."

"You are not human." The Spaniard stared at Bomba with burning eyes. "Do you feel no fear that you can be so calm in the face of what is to happen?"

"Bomba may fear," replied the lad simply, "but fear has never yet been Bomba's master."

Antonio Spiro laughed harshly.

"That is a rebuke to me, my young white boy. But it is not death I fear. Antonio Spiro, whatever may be said against him, is no coward. Even torture I could bear. But to be eaten by these savages with their painted faces and their teeth like jaguars' teeth—ah, that is too much! If the cords that bind my hands were only about my neck, with what eagerness would I choke myself to death!"

Near by, filling the air with a weird reverberation, rose the roar of the great white bird. The haggard face of the Spaniard lighted with a fierce gleam of hope.

"Comrades!" he shouted in a shrill voice that cut through Bomba like the blade of a knife. "To me. It is I, Antonio Spiro! To me! To me!"

He tried to get up, but could not because of the fetters on his legs.

The hut filled with savages. A gag was forced into the Spaniard's mouth, stretching it cruelly. Then he was kicked viciously in the face. He lay there helpless, quivering with rage and pain.

Bomba was seized with a red wrath, fiercer than any he had ever known. His lips curled away from his strong white teeth in a snarl of rage. White blood called to white. With a weapon in his hand he would have fought the whole tribe.

But he had no weapon. He was helpless. A savage kicked him brutally, another reddened his spear point in the lad's back.

Then the hut was empty again save for the doomed captives.

The roar of the great white bird grew fainter overhead, softer and softer, until it died away in the distance.

Spiro lay still. Bomba crept close to him.

"Can the white man hear me?" he asked.

A slight motion of the Spaniard's head answered him.

"Then listen," went on Bomba. "Hope is not dead yet. You heard. Your friends still look for you."

An almost imperceptible shrug of his companion's shoulders was his only answer.

"The native, Gibo, has not been recaptured by the tribe," said Bomba. "If he did not crash to death over the precipice, he will try to aid us. He may still live. It is possible. We will not despair. We will find a way."

Utter silence showed his comrade's incredulity.

Outside in the clearing came the fluttering, menacing throb of a drum. Shadows fell thick upon the village. Hour after hour the tribal fires sent fingers of flame up into the night, summoning the bucks to the great feast of the morrow. Hour after hour, Bomba and Spiro lay and listened to the sinister, steady, rhythmic beat of the drum.

At last silence descended, a thick, deadening silence. The flames flickered out. The village was bathed in an almost tangible, pulsing blackness.

Spiro moaned and tossed. His body was hot to Bomba's touch, despite the fact that the night had grown cool.

The torch in the hut had burned down to its

holder and there was only light enough to make darkness visible.

Bomba lay flat upon his back. His mind was tense as a bowstring as it dwelt on possible plans of escape.

Then abruptly a thrill went through him.

The ground beneath him was moving!

CHAPTER XXI

THROUGH THE TUNNEL

THE motion of the earth beneath him was so slight and it stopped so suddenly that Bomba was puzzled.

Had he fallen asleep? Had he dreamed that the floor of his prison moved?

No, there it was again, faint and undulating like the movement of a snake.

Instantly, Bomba was on the alert. What was it that had made the floor move? Was it some beast that had dug itself into the ground to sleep and now was striving to break through the crust of earth?

He knew that alligators did this at times and only emerged after weeks of hibernation.

He might call out, arouse the village. But by so doing he would only reserve himself and his companion for a fate more horrible than the jaws of any wild creature. No, he would lie still and wait!

The floor moved again, more decidedly this time. Instinctively, Bomba strove to get his

hands down to his belt and draw out his machete.

Then he remembered that he was unarmed. He ground his teeth in impotent rage.

Ah! There it was again! Each movement of the earth became more distinct. Whatever it was that was beneath him was breaking steadily up through the ground, layer by layer.

Bomba got up on his elbow and peered at the white man in the darkness, which was now almost complete, the torch having burned almost to an ash. Spiro lay motionless. Was he asleep? Or was that immobility the stupor brought on by fever? Or was it death?

Bomba leaned closer, touched the body of his companion. It was almost as though he had touched fire. Antonio Spiro lived, his body was hot.

Again came that singular rolling motion of the earth. Only a thin crust now separated Bomba from whatever it was that moved. He must act quickly or it would be too late.

He rolled over until he was close beside Spiro. He whispered in the white man's ear.

"Awake, Spiro!" he hissed. "There is new danger. Awake!"

The Spaniard moaned softly. Bomba, whose eyes were like a cat's in the darkness, saw that his eyes were open. His lips close to his companion's ear, Bomba asked:

"Can Spiro hear me?"

The Spaniard nodded. Bomba could feel that every muscle of the white man tensed. He became as rigid as a statue. Only his eyes lived.

"There is something here under us, something beneath the floor of the hut, something that moves," whispered Bomba. "Bomba knows not what it is, but we must be on our guard."

Antonio Spiro spoke for the first time.

"We are unarmed," he groaned.

"Wait!" hissed Bomba. "Do not move!"

The crust of earth was broken through. There was a hole as big as a man's hand where Bomba had lain.

What would come through that hole?

Boy and man remained motionless, eyes upon the opening.

For some minutes nothing happened. There was no further tremor of the earth, no sound, no movement.

The tension became unbearable. Bomba's muscles, held in leash, rippled beneath the bronzed skin. His lips drew back from his teeth in the unconscious gesture of a wild beast at bay.

The Spaniard moved slightly. But Bomba's fingers upon his arm were like steel.

Another minute! Two! Then something reared itself through that hole in the floor of the hut, something scarcely distinguishable from a

darker blot in the darkness, something with eyes and nose and mouth.

"It is no beast," thought Bomba, "but man."

Then a name was spoken in the darkness. It was no more than the faintest breath of sound, but it carried with tremendous power to the ears of Bomba.

The name that was spoken was "master."

Scarcely daring to believe his ears, Bomba crept forward, closer, closer to that hole in the earth.

Antonio Spiro caught at him with his hand.

"Go no closer," he whispered. "It is madness! It is death!"

"No," returned Bomba, "it is life!"

Close to the head that reared itself through the opening, Bomba muttered one word:

"Gibo!"

"I have come, my master."

The voice of the Indian trembled. Yet there was joy and triumph in the crying of that word, "master." Gibo had feared greatly. But he loved greatly, and that love had conquered fear.

A fierce joy welled up in Bomba.

"You have made a tunnel, Gibo?"

"Yes, master," was the reply. "Follow Gibo quickly, or all will be lost."

Antonio Spiro did not understand the jungle language in which Bomba and Gibo spoke. But

he grasped the fact that here was a chance, an unbelievable chance, to escape.

"We are bound, Gibo," Bomba whispered.

Through the opening, Gibo passed a long-bladed knife.

"Put out your hands, master," he said. "Gibo will cut the cords."

In an instant Bomba's wrists were freed. He cut the thongs that bound his ankles. Then he slashed through the bonds of Spiro.

"Quick!" he muttered to the latter. "Follow Bomba!"

Gibo lifted his arms through the opening and spread them so that the surface of the hole grew wide enough to admit the body of a man. Then Gibo's head disappeared.

Bomba let himself down into the hole and found himself in a narrow tunnel scarcely larger than himself. He pushed on as fast as he could until his body came in contact with that of Gibo.

"Not so fast, master," pleaded the Indian. "Bomba moves like the anaconda in the jungle, but Gibo is slow."

If Bomba's progress seemed swift to Gibo, it was torturingly slow to the lad himself.

Behind him there still was silence in the village. Their attempt at escape had not yet been discovered. But as he wriggled his way along like a mole underground, Bomba expected each

moment to hear the warning roll of the drum, the cries of their savage captors.

"Each moment is precious," he told himself. "If they should discover us now before we reach the door of Gibo's tunnel, we shall be surely lost."

Antonio Spiro was following close behind Bomba. The lad could hear the hard breathing of the heavier man as he forced his body through the narrow passage.

The atmosphere of the dirt tunnel became hot, almost unbreathable. The fugitives gasped, choked, fought for breath. Yet they pushed on doggedly, knowing that to pause where they were meant certain death.

The tunnel seemed unending. It seemed incredible that even in the soft earth such a passage could have been dug by one man. Later the story of Gibo's tireless devotion, his unremitting labor, was to be told to Bomba. But there were not many details of the Indian's sacrifice that Bomba had not guessed before he reached the mouth of the tunnel.

Sometimes they were forced from exhaustion to pause and rest. At such times they listened with every sense alert for any sound that might signify pursuit.

Only dead silence! Was Gibo's ruse to be successful? Were they actually to escape from Gonibobo and their hideous fate?

"Courage, master," Gibo's voice came to Bomba as they struggled on. "We are reaching the end. Soon we shall be in the open air."

"Wait!" exclaimed Bomba. "What is that?"

From what seemed to be a great distance, noises came to them, sounds of shouting, the beating of a drum.

"They have discovered our flight," cried Spiro. "We are dead men."

A few seconds of nightmare struggle and they reached the mouth of the tunnel.

They drew in the cool night air in great draughts, wiped the dirt from their faces, cleared their eyes of the stinging grit.

The noise now had swelled into an uproar.

"Whither shall we fly, master?" cried Gibo.

"Let us make for the river bank," interposed Spiro. "At the worst we can throw ourselves in and swim or drown. And if the savages choose the wrong line of pursuit, we may be able to build a fire. My friends may see it and come to our help in the plane."

"The savages also will see it," muttered Bomba. "Yet it will be well to be near the river. Come!"

Through the heavy brush they pushed their way. The older man was not as swift as Bomba, nor was Gibo. Time and again, the jungle boy paused to give a hand to one or lift up the other.

It was slow, torturing progress, with the sounds of pursuit growing steadily louder.

"If the worse comes to worst," gasped the Spaniard, "we have the knife of Gibo, young white boy. Its point can reach our hearts and cheat Gonibobo of his prey."

"The white man speaks truth," retorted Bomba grimly, "but it will find other hearts before it finds ours."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SWOOPING PLANE

THE fugitives strained their eyes for some sight of the white crests of the river and their ears for some sound of its rushing waters. But neither was vouchsafed them, and the conviction forced itself upon them that in the darkness and confusion they had taken the wrong direction.

And ever the cries of their pursuers grew more distinct.

"We are lost!" cried Gibo. "We cannot outrun the savages, for this is their district and they know it well. Our one chance is to find some place to hide."

"There is no place where we can hide that they will not find us," replied Bomba. "If we are not swift enough of foot to distance them, we will at the last stand and fight. The men of Gonibobo shall not take us alive."

The beating of the drum ceased suddenly. So also did the war cries of the savages.

The hoarse whisper of Spiro cut the silence.

"They have lost the trail," he panted. "They have given up the chase."

"No," replied Bomba, wise in the way of his enemies. "It means, Spiro, that they have found the trail. They will steal upon us like the creeping death—"

"Hark!" interrupted Spiro. "Listen!"

From a distance came that roar, now familiar to the ears of Bomba and Gibo, the roar of the great white bird. Now it was the sweetest music. The noise grew louder until it beat the air like a thousand drums.

"They seek for me!" cried Spiro. "They have seen the light of the enemies' torches. Carlos, Ramon, they still seek for their lost friend."

He was seized by a feverish activity.

"Come!" he cried. "There is an open space not far from here, the place where I was captured. We must find it, for only there can the plane come down. Follow me. We may yet be saved."

He had lapsed into Spanish in his excitement, but though Bomba and Gibo could not translate the words, they grasped his meaning and followed at his heels.

They came at last to a broad plateau that Spiro recognized at once.

"It is the place!" he cried. "Quick, Bomba! Quick, Gibo! We will build a fire that can be seen from the sky."

"It will bring the savages on us like an army of wasps," protested Gibo.

"Let it," interjected Bomba. "Spiro is right. It is our one chance."

The roar came nearer, louder.

"Make haste!" cried Spiro. "Brushwood! Heaps of it! A fire!"

They worked desperately, and in a few seconds had a large heap ready to be lighted.

Whether the savages had for the moment lost the trail, or whether the roar of the great white bird was filling them with superstitious fear, the fugitives did not know. At any rate, they had a few moments of respite and the pile of brushwood grew swiftly.

Antonio Spiro felt frantically in his pockets.

"A match!" he cried. "I cannot start the fire without a match!"

"Stand back!" commanded the jungle boy. "Bomba will start the fire."

He bent down, working with his flint. In a few seconds there was a spark, a flame. The tinder-like brushwood caught fire and flung signals of forked fire skyward.

"Carlos! Ramon!" cried Spiro.

The Spaniard stood with his arms outstretched, the mane of black hair in wild confusion about his pallid face, eyes upraised toward the sky.

The roar above became deafening.

And now the fringe of bushes about the clearing had become alive with creeping figures.

Hideous faces peered out at the group about the fire, faces out of a nightmare.

With a yell and a rush the savages swarmed into the open space. But they stopped aghast at the sight that met their eyes.

Swooping down from the sky came what to them was a frightful monster, whose wings in the light of the fire were of the color of fresh-spilled blood, whose voice was like the thunder of the cataract.

One savage was caught by its revolving blades. Instantly he was robbed of life. His body fell with a thud to the ground, a heap of mangled flesh.

The panic-stricken cannibals fled wildly or fell down on their faces as the aërial Juggernaut swept over them.

The plane teetered, almost touched a wing to the ground, ran a few hundred feet and came to a stop near the fugitives.

"Spiro!" called a deep voice from the cockpit. "It is you, my comrade. Jump in!"

Spiro caught Bomba's arm. Bomba looked to where Gibo stood, shaking like an aspen.

"Come, Gibo," cried the lad. "Bomba will not go without you."

"Climb in, Spiro," came the urgent voice from the plane.

Spiro leaped into the airship.

"Come!" he cried to Bomba. "There is room for you and Gibo! Why do you wait?"

The savages were pressing forward by imperceptible degrees. Their first fright was wearing off as they saw that the newcomers were men instead of emissaries from the evil gods. And as they saw Spiro disappear into the monster bird with Bomba and Gibo about to follow, fear gave way to rage.

A spear was thrown that missed Gibo by a hairbreadth. With a wild yell the savages surged forward.

The engine was running and the plane began to quiver.

"Come!" cried Spiro again. "Jump in!"

"As far as the river," shouted Bomba, as he scrambled into the plane, pulling the protesting Indian after him.

Slowly at first the plane moved across the cleared space, then more swiftly as the motor's hum deepened into a roar.

For a moment the enraged savages gave ground. This thing they did not understand, this bird that had no feathers yet moved on wings and whose song was like that of the thunder, bewildered, baffled, daunted them.

There was a brief time of breathless suspense. The space was small for a successful take-off. Would the plane gather enough headway to lift it

from the ground before reaching the jungle fringe of trees where it would be dashed to destruction?

Bomba, crouching in the fuselage, did not know. He only knew that his ears were full of a deafening cadence, his heart stirred with awe of this white man's contrivance that he did not understand.

A group of savage faces stared at the moving plane. They were baffled faces, full of a terrible rage.

One man, taller than the rest, plunged forward, shouting the war cry of the tribe. His fellows surged forward in his wake.

"Crouch down!" yelled Spiro.

Spears filled the air with a deadly hail. The savages rushed toward the plane, careless of the deadly propeller.

But now the great white bird had gathered momentum and, rising from the ground, soared up toward the skies, her engine roaring defiance at the enemy.

Bomba held his breath. Surely this was something supernatural, this great white phantom that had swooped down from nowhere to carry him into the air like a fish caught in the talons of a hawk!

He had escaped the immediate danger, that from the cannibals. But what impalpable danger might lie in this thing that seemed to defy all

natural laws by whizzing through the sky like the meteors that Bomba had sometimes watched when the star fall was plentiful?

But while Bomba held his fear in check, Gibo was conquered by his. This must be Igmazil, the great snake of the demon gods, that for some reason had assumed the form of this sky wagon. For a long time his menacing shadow had hung over the superstitious mind of the Indian. Now Igmazil had him in his power!

He would have leaped from the plane, but Bomba caught him, held him back.

"The white men are our friends, Gibo," he said. "They will carry us to the bank of the river at a great distance from the tribe of Gonibobo.

Suddenly Antonio Spiro began to laugh. It was a wild, harsh laugh that suggested hysteria. Bomba stared at him in consternation. Had something snapped in the white man? Was his mind giving way?

Bomba whirled, warned by a catlike motion beside him.

With a mad scream Gibo had leaped to his feet and gone over the side of the plane!

CHAPTER XXIII

SNATCHED FROM DESTRUCTION

BOMBA's action, almost instinctive, was inconceivably quick. Simultaneously with Gibo's shriek, the jungle boy leaped to the side of the plane. His outstretched hand caught something and held. His fingers had closed about the ankle of the native.

But the jerk given by that falling body almost proved Bomba's undoing.

The boy felt himself yanked from his feet. He threw himself backward with all his strength. But he was slipping, slipping! In his ears was the rush of the wind cloven by the plane. Beneath him was nothing but thick, velvet, pulsing darkness. A nausea seized him, a terrible dizziness.

Then he, in turn, was seized and held by a firm hand, that of Spiro, supplemented a second later by that of Ramon.

The two men tugged at Bomba and drew him back into the plane. Then they aided him in drawing up Gibo. A moment more and the Indian was safe.

Gibo's head slumped to one side. He lay inert.

"Crazy fool!" growled Spiro. "What was he trying to do—commit suicide?"

"It may be that Gibo has died of fright," replied Bomba soberly. "There seems no life in him."

"He nearly pulled you down with him to death," commented the Spaniard. "Yet you seem to bear him no grudge."

Bomba looked at him in surprise.

"Gibo risked his life for Bomba, for Spiro," the lad said. "He dug a tunnel and came back when he knew it might mean death. Bomba at any time would risk his life for Gibo, who is Bomba's friend."

"There speaks a man," declared Spiro. "If I have ever doubted, Bomba, that you were white, I do so no longer. You have white blood and a noble heart. I would shake your hand, young white boy, for if ever I have met a brave man, you are one."

The heart of the jungle boy swelled with pride. His hand met that of Spiro in the hearty grip of the white man, the grip that Bomba had learned meant friendship.

Gibo stirred, moaned. He was not dead. Bomba rejoiced exceedingly. But he did not try to arouse the Indian to consciousness just then.

Better to wait till they were near the time of landing.

Bomba was very thoughtful. His first dread of the plane had passed. It was not a devouring monster, but a friend. There were wonders, he knew, in the great world outside the jungle. The plane was one of them.

His hand tingled from the memory of the white man's clasp. It had been the call of white to white, a sort of initiation into the white brotherhood. Bomba's lonely heart exulted. He, the jungle boy, had had his white blood recognized!

A cooler touch in the air aroused him from his reverie.

"The river!" he exclaimed. "We come to a river."

The Spaniard responded:

"The river is now beneath us, my young white boy. My comrades take you across the river becaue they know of a better landing place on the other side."

"That is well," the lad responded. "Bomba would cross the river, because then he will be nearer to the tribe of the good Indians, to the village of Hondura."

Antonio Spiro turned from the jungle boy to converse with his companions in the Spanish tongue, and at some length. There appeared to

be some difference of opinion, and while they argued Bomba grew impatient.

"The river is already behind us, Spiro," cried the lad. "Gibo comes to life. Bomba would land now."

"It shall be as you say, young white boy," returned the Spaniard. "My comrades did not wish to land at this spot. They said there was danger. But I have persuaded them."

Of a sudden the roar of the great white bird subsided into a hum. The plane slipped down through the darkness in widening circles. It seemed to Bomba that he could feel the earth rushing up to meet him.

He drew in his breath sharply. Gibo, still in a daze, uttered an exclamation of fright. Bomba held him, quieted him with soothing words.

The plane touched the ground, bounded up lightly, then skimmed along the earth for some distance and came to a stop.

"All right," called Carlos, who was acting as pilot. "Here is the place. Good luck go with you! You have saved our friend and we thank you."

Bomba and Gibo were glad enough to scramble over the side of the plane and feel their feet on solid ground once more.

Spiro leaned over the side of the plane. Once again his hand groped for the hand of Bomba.

"Good-by, young white boy," he said, with feeling. "Antonio Spiro owes much to Bomba. He will never forget."

"Good-by," murmured Bomba.

The pilot opened the throttle and the engine sputtered into a roar. Bomba took pride now in having conquered his fear of the plane and stood so close to it that one of the men was forced to shout to him to get out of danger.

Once more that monstrous thing from the world beyond the ken of Bomba soared into the air. The noise of it awoke the jungle. Birds that had been sleeping began to chirp and twitter. Monkeys chattered crossly. There was a stir of living things in the underbrush.

The song of the great white bird grew fainter until it came to the ears of Bomba like the distant twang of a bowstring. Then it died away altogether.

Bomba should have been jubilant at his escape from the hands of the cannibals, and of course he was. Yet, blended with his exultation, was a sudden sadness and loneliness that he could not understand.

Was it because of the leaving of Antonio Spiro, who had been his friend? Or was it perhaps the breaking of the link that had bound him, if only for a brief space, to people from the world without, the world of the white men to which he be-

longed by right, yet from which he was actually at so great a distance?

Bomba could not analyze his emotions. But still the sadness grew.

"The jungle is a little thing," he thought. "Here things crawl and creep. Here things lie in the mud and sicken and die. In the great world outside there is brightness and joy. Men live and smile and shake the hand in friendship. They do not have to meet the alligator and the anaconda. They do not have to flee from cannibals. That is the world of the white men. Will Bomba, the jungle boy, ever see its wonders?"

He wrenched his gaze from the sky, flung his hair back with a shake of his head and plunged into the jungle, with Gibo, who had uttered no word, close at his heels.

The faint gray of early dawn tinged the eastern sky. Despite the fearful night he had passed, Bomba stopped not for rest. That could come later, perhaps, when he should have put a safer distance between him and the tribe of Gonibobo.

One thing brought comfort to the hearts of the fugitives. They were no longer in the region of the baleful colopichi trees. Nor were the poisonous, brilliantly hued flowers in evidence that had stolen into the senses of the jungle lad and led to his capture by the cannibals. They were in the old-time jungle that they knew—full of dangers of

many kinds, but at least exempt from the deadly vegetation that they had found on the trail of terror.

The underbrush here was much less dense than that in many other sections, and they made rapid progress. Bomba was driven by a great urge to reach at the earliest moment the village of Hondura, where dwelt Casson.

In the forefront of his mind was the thought of the mutilated notebook that he bore beneath the puma skin. Would Casson be able to read that strange writing? Spiro could not, and the Spaniard had explained his failure by saying that the writing was in a strange tongue. Was Casson wiser than Spiro? The old naturalist seemed to know many things, at least he had before the accident that had left him half-crazed. Could he tell what those pages meant?

Gradually Bomba began to pick up well known signs, to identify places and things he had seen before. His heart thrilled with gladness as familiar landmarks grew in number.

A parrot dropped upon his shoulder and pecked playfully at his ear.

"Woowoo!" cried Bomba joyfully, stroking the bird's gorgeous plumage. "Woowoo has not forgotten Bomba! Bomba is glad to see his friend again!"

Woowoo rode on his shoulder for a consider-

able distance through the jungle. Then there was a commotion in the branches overhead, a fluttering rush, and another parrot alighted upon the lad's other shoulder.

"It is Kiki!" cried the lad delightedly. "Now does Bomba know beyond doubt that he is nearing the village where dwells Hondura. Woowoo and Kiki bear glad tidings to the heart of Bomba."

Gibo looked on at the strange scene wonderingly. As he saw the confidence of the wild creatures in their human friend, his adoration of Bomba grew apace.

"Surely one who can so tame the birds of the jungle must be more than human," he thought, and into his worship of his master crept a superstitious awe.

Then when all was quiet and peaceful the parrots uttered a sharp warning and flew away.

"Beware, master!" shrieked Gibo. "The jaguar! The jaguar!"

There was no time for the jungle boy to throw himself on the defense. No time to draw his knife. No time even to leap back.

Through the air a tawny body came hurtling, jaws snarling, eyes blazing, claws outstretched.

CHAPTER XXIV

A FRIEND IN NEED

JUST after the spring of the jaguar, another body, equally massive, met it in mid-air, and the fierce beasts fell to the ground together.

So close were they to Bomba that a claw of the jaguar grazed his leg, through which stabbed a sharp, searing pain.

There was a hideous snarling and panting as the beasts, locked in a death grapple, rolled over and over, each trying to get a hold upon the other's throat.

"Polulu!" cried Bomba, as he recognized the giant puma that was struggling with the jaguar. "Good Polulu! He has come to the help of Bomba when Bomba most needed a friend."

Bomba and the puma had been friends for years. Their acquaintance had begun when the jungle lad had found the puma with its leg held under a tree that had caught it in falling. Bomba had been touched with pity at the animal's plight and had released the leg from the tree and bound it up, the intelligent brute, fierce as it was, feel-

ing the goodwill of the boy and letting him do with it as he willed.

Bomba had nursed the puma and brought it food until the injured leg was well again, and from that time on the giant puma had been bound to the lad in strong affection. It had purred and gamboled like a kitten when Bomba caressed its head and scratched its ears.

More than once in the years that had since elapsed Polulu had paid his debt to Bomba when the jungle boy had been sorely beset by enemies, and now he had arrived on the spot when the boy needed him greatly.

It was a fearful struggle that was going on. The beasts were almost equally matched in size, but the jaguar was younger, while Polulu, once the king of the jungle, had passed his prime.

Bomba saw that the jaguar had worked its head around until its wicked jaws were fastened in the shoulder of the puma. Polulu, try as he would, could not break that hold. And when that hold should be shifted from the shoulder to the throat—

Bomba warily approached the combatants. Gibo darted out from the tree behind which he had sought refuge and clutched at the lad's arm.

"It is death to interfere, master!" he cried. "Let the two beasts kill each other. We will fly while there is still time."

Bomba shook him off impatiently.

"Gibo should know," he said, "that Bomba does not desert a friend."

A friend! Gibo looked at his companion as though he thought he had gone mad.

It was dangerous work approaching the furious combatants, armed only with a knife. But the desperate look in the eyes of Polulu as he sought in vain to break the grip of the jaguar sent Bomba forward with a tiger-like swiftness.

He watched his chance. It came. The knife rose and fell with deadly aim. The movement was almost too swift for the eye to follow it, but the blade had found its mark.

With a scream of pain and fury the jaguar leaped into the air and fell sprawling over the body of its adversary.

Bomba barely escaped the cuff of one of those clutching claws. But when he cautiously approached the big cat to withdraw his knife, the glazing eyes told him that the jaguar had fought its last fight.

Polulu wriggled from beneath the dead jaguar and sat panting and licking his wounds. Bomba rushed forward to caress the great shaggy head.

"Beware, master! Is Bomba mad?" Gibo cried out sharply.

Polulu purred and wriggled his body like a great dog.

"The beast will kill!" cried the Indian, in an agony of apprehension. "He but pretends friendship."

For answer Bomba put out his brown hand and smoothed the massive head. The puma pressed close to the lad and rubbed against him affectionately.

"We meet again, Polulu," said the lad gravely. "Once more you have saved the life of Bomba and he in turn saved yours. We are good friends, Bomba and Polulu."

The great brute seemed to understand him, and it licked the jungle boy's hand while the latter explained to the wondering Indian his old acquaintance with the puma.

At last the boy started up, wiped off his knife, and returned it to his belt and turned to his companion.

"Come, Gibo," he said, "we must hasten. We are near home now and Bomba would reach the camp of Hondura before sundown."

The great puma would not leave them, and followed for many hours through the jungle. Although Bomba frequently paused to stroke the shaggy head, Gibo could not be persuaded to go near the beast. It was perhaps just as well, for Polulu made only one exception to his general hostility toward humankind, although any friend of Bomba's was safe during the lad's presence.

At last, as homelike scenes became more plentiful, Bomba gave the beast a last caress and pointed back into the jungle. Polulu obeyed, though with reluctance, a reluctance that was not at all felt by Gibo, who breathed a sigh of relief as the beast vanished into the heavy undergrowth.

They caught fish in one of the many small streams they crossed, cooked them, and went on, eating as they went.

As they neared their goal, Bomba's impatience grew. Those pages from the notebook of Japazy seemed to burn into his flesh. The thought that in a few hours he perhaps might know the secret they contained drove him on with ever-increasing swiftness toward the maloca of Hondura and the dwelling place of Cody Casson, Casson upon whom all his hopes were now placed!

Then he paused abruptly.

Sounds had come to him, small sounds which yet carried significance to the trained ears of the jungle boy. Bomba knew that he and Gibo were watched, that the woods all about them were full of prying eyes.

Whose eyes? Perhaps those of the head-hunters of Nascanora and Tocarora, those dreaded savages who more than once on their mission of death had invaded these precincts of the jungle.

Bomba stood still and looked about him. Gibo crept close.

"What is it, master?" he asked of Bomba. "The eyes of Gibo see nothing."

Bomba said nothing. He stood, rigid as granite, his hand upon the knife at his belt, watching the trees ahead of them.

A heavy screen of vines was thrust aside and into the cleared space stepped an Indian buck.

Like a flash, Bomba pulled his knife from its sheath. With equal swiftness he thrust it back again.

Gibo cried out and darted behind a tree. Bomba called to him.

"Come back, Gibo," he commanded. "This is no enemy but a friend of Bomba's. He is a brave of the tribe of the good chief, Hondura."

A dozen more Indians emerged from the undergrowth. Their friendly grins dispelled Gibo's fears. They welcomed Bomba with all the eagerness that the stolidity of their race permitted, then the Indians led the travelers to the maloca of Hondura.

A question trembled on Bomba's lips that he feared to put into words.

Was Casson still alive?

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE VERGE

THE party soon came to the outskirts of the village. From a knot of Indian women a fantastic figure detached itself and came swiftly toward Bomba.

"Sobrinini!" cried Bomba. "You are here and well. They found you then in the jungle! Bomba's heart was sore for fear that Sobrinini was lost."

The old woman laughed shrilly.

"Sobrinini's time has not yet come," she cackled. "Ashati and Neram found me in the jungle and brought me to the village of Hondura."

"And Cody Casson?" asked Bomba eagerly. "Is he—well?" His heart almost stood still while he waited for the answer.

The fantastic clothing of Sobrinini flapped in the wind. Her gray hair straggled wildly about her withered face. She nodded toward a hut that stood a little apart from the others and seemed more sheltered than the rest.

"He is better," she said, "but he is not well,

No, no, Cody Casson will never be well again." A thrill of joy ran through Bomba. It was enough for the moment to know that the old man lived.

In accordance with tribal custom, Bomba went first to Hondura to pay his respects. The wrinkled face of the old chief was beaming with smiles and he welcomed Bomba with almost the same warmth that he would have shown toward his own son. He gave orders at once that a feast should be held to celebrate the return of the well-loved jungle boy. He welcomed Gibo also as a friend of Bomba's and put him in the friendly care of some of the young men of the tribe.

As Bomba emerged from the chief's hut he was suddenly stopped by a small whirlwind. It was the little Pirah, the daughter of Hondura. The small Indian maiden flung herself into Bomba's arms, chattering to him joyously. It was some time before Bomba could disengage himself and hurry toward the hut of Casson.

He at length entered the hut and threw himself on his knees before the frail figure reclining on a cot. The old man raised himself and put his arms about the lad, while tears welled from the faded eyes.

"You have come back to me, Bomba," he said. "It is well. I had feared that I should never look upon your face again."

Bomba's voice was husky as he poured out words of affection for the old man who had stood to him in the place of parents and who had ever the chief place in his heart.

There was a long interchange of questions and answers, and Bomba was rejoiced to see that, though the old man had wasted physically, his mind seemed to be a little clearer than when he had last seen him.

"I have papers here taken from Japazy," Bomba said. "Will Casson read them?"

A light of eagerness leaped into the eyes of Casson.

"Let me see them," he said.

With shaking fingers Bomba felt beneath the puma skin and brought out the mutilated notebook of the half-breed.

"The book is torn," he explained. "The cannibals tried to take it from me and they got some of the leaves. But perhaps there is enough left to tell Bomba what he would know of his father and mother."

Casson took the book and examined it curiously, while Bomba watched him with all his soul in his eyes.

But it was not with Casson as it had been with Spiro, when the latter had looked blankly at the scrawled pages. The old man had been a famous scholar in his day, and his face lighted up as he

gazed at what were to Bomba meaningless hieroglyphics.

"It is Greek," he murmured. "That much Casson can see at once. But the pages are much discolored and the ink is faint. It is hard to read."

Bomba's heart sank. Was his last reliance to fail him?

But the next words brought a tinge of hope with them.

"If it were the old Greek, it would be easier," went on Casson, as he studied the script. "The new Greek is much mixed with Turkish words and those from other nations. But I think I can make out the sense of it. Japazy!" he muttered. "He had Greek blood mingled with French. Some of the French words have crept in. Let me see. Let me see."

He began to read somewhat slowly and painfully, gathering sometimes from the context what was not wholly clear in the words themselves. And Bomba listened eagerly.

He had been right in thinking that his father's name was Bartow, Andrew Bartow. And his mother's name was Laura, the "dear sweet Laura," as Casson had referred to her at times when he was trying to remember. They had had a son. That son had been called "Bonnie Andy," or "Bonny" for short.

Bomba's heart leaped. He must be that son. He could easily see how "Bonny" had been gradually changed into "Bomba" as Casson had become more moody and abstracted and hardly knew what he was saying.

The old man paused. His own memories had been stirred by the reading and tears were in the old eyes.

"Go on, Casson! Oh, go on," urged Bomba.

Light came gradually as Casson read page after page. There were breaks here and there that Bomba's imagination had to supply. But in the main the story was continuous and coherent. Throughout it all the bitterness of the half-breed was apparent. In places there was a perfect torrent of vituperation hurled against Bartow and Laura. Bomba could almost hear the half-breed stuttering with wrath. He evidently hated the two with a deadly hatred. But why?

Bomba was not long in learning. Bartow and Laura, his wife, had come from the Middle West of America. Bomba thrilled at this. Were not Frank Parkhurst and his mother, the woman with the golden hair, Americans? They had taken up their residence in Rome, where Laura, gifted with a golden voice, pursued her musical studies. She had become a famous opera singer. She had met Sobrinini, herself at the time an operatic star, and they had been close friends un-

til Sobrinini had become jealous of Laura's fame and an estrangement had followed. Casson was Laura's uncle and himself was in Rome. Laura and her husband had been devotedly attached to each other and their infant son. Everything had gone happily until—

Casson's voice at this point trailed off into nothingness and Bomba woke from the spell that had been cast upon him.

"Go on, go on, Casson!" cried the lad.

"I can't," said the old man. "There is no more. I have come to the end. The other pages have been torn out."

Bomba felt as though he had been plunged to the bottom of an abyss.

"There must be more!" he cried. "Look, Casson, look!"

The old man shook his head wearily.

"No," he reiterated. "There is no more."

The light in the old man's eyes was fading. Bomba saw with dread that he was falling back into the old daze.

A thought came to him. He took his knife and ripped open a seam in the puma skin. There, sewed up securely in a waterproof covering, he had carried, through all his wanderings, the picture of the lovely woman he had torn from the walls of Sobrinini.

"Look! Look!" he cried, as he held up the

portrait before Casson, the beautiful face, sweet and appealing, the soft hair waving back from the broad forehead, the lips half-parted in a smile, the dark and melting eyes!

"Look, Casson," repeated Bomba. "Is this Laura? Is this my mother?"

A shock seemed to run through Casson. With a cry, he reached forward and took the picture from the boy's hand.

Again he seemed all alive, and Bomba hastened to take advantage of it.

"Tell me, Casson!" he pleaded passionately. "Does she live? Where is she? Japazy said he killed her."

"Japazy lies," replied the old man. "Japazy struck down your father in a jealous rage because he thought—falsely, the fool!—that your father was paying attentions to Japazy's wife. He tried to kill your mother, too; but he failed. Thinking he had killed them both, Japazy fled. But they recovered, and later on, in the course of operatic engagements, came to Brazil. I came, too. Then we became separated and in some way I—I—"

Again his voice died away. The flare of excitement that had roused his dormant energies to action was flickering out. Bomba saw with dread the old familiar signs that the door of Casson's mind, held ajar for a moment, was closing.

"Think, Casson, think!" he begged desperately. "Go on, go on!"

But it was of no use. The door had closed. Casson looked uncomprehendingly at Bomba.

"It is late, and Casson is weary," he murmured. "Casson would sleep," and Bomba knew that for the time he was beaten.

Mentally he raged against fate. Was he always doomed to have the cup of full knowledge dashed from his lips just when he was ready to quaff it? What had his long journeys brought him? The jewels of Japazy, that he had snatched up at the last moment from the cannibal hut? He would have given all of them for five minutes more of revelation from the lips of Casson. Oh, that he had those missing pages! He would get them yet!

Then gentler thoughts came to him. He took up reverently his mother's picture and gazed at it through a mist of tears.

"I will yet find you, Mother," he murmured. "Bomba will feel your arms around him, your kiss upon his lips."

THE END

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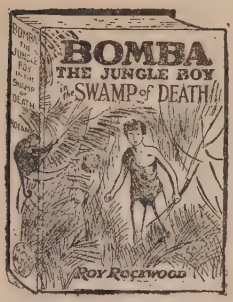

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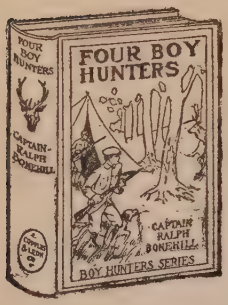

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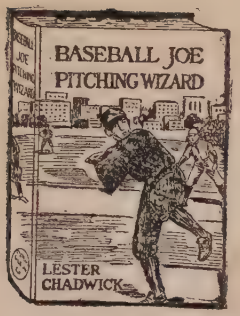

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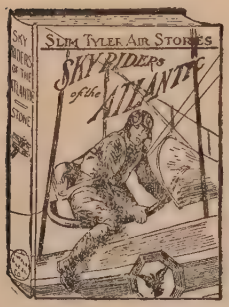

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